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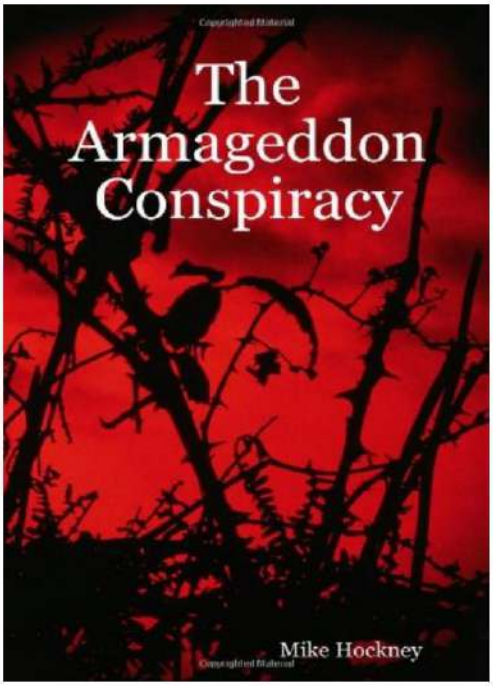
THE ARMAGEDDON CONSPIRACY



por Mike Hockney

Hyperreality Books

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Author's preview.

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A Illuminati

"The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his gazes. "Where has God gone?" he cried. "I'll tell you. We killed him - you and I are all his killers."
Nietzsche

Preface

he archive section of the MI5 headquarters at Thames House in London contains a document called The Cainite Destiny which to this day has never been explained. On May 22, 1945, shortly after the end of World War II, British soldiers arrested SS-Sturmbannführer Friedrich Velde, an adjutant Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler. The soldiers found a document hidden in a compartment in the heel of one of Velde's shoes. As soon as MI5 police questioned him about this, Velde committed suicide by biting into a cyanide capsule that he had hidden in a false tooth.

The document is a single page from Velde's personal diary. The rest were never recovered and are considered lost or destroyed. The entry describes the moment on March 12, 1938, when Hitler took possession of the Spear of Destiny - the thrust thrust into the side of Jesus Christ at the crucifixion.

Reinhardt Weiss, the German-born Cambridge University professor of History employed by MI5 to translate and interpret the page, said its content challenged any conventional version of history, or Nazism, of which he was aware. He believed it was the most important document on earth and greatly claimed the future of the world depended on it. When MI5 rejected his conclusions and dismissed The Cainite Destiny as the fantastical ramblings of a mad Nazi, Weiss quit his job and moved to the United States to prepare for what he was certain was coming.

April 24, 2012, in London

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ven before it happened, people knew it was coming. At three o'clock GMT, everyone in the world in every time zone felt the same sudden dread, as if the planet had stepped over its own grave. Not a single person chose to speak about it. Those who had been awakened from their sleep closed their eyes and prayed that it was just a nightmare, and those who were in their offices returned to their computers, those who were in the middle of conversations tried to continue with what they were saying.

By seven o'clock in London, the city was preparing for what everyone prayed would be an ordinary Tuesday. Londoners went to work as usual, had the usual conversations with the usual people, made all the usual journeys on trains, buses and tubes, carried out all the usual routines. For the last month, a heatwave has gripped southeast England and has followed the same pattern today. Most workers wore light summer clothing to try to make the sultry conditions more bearable. The next few hours passed normally.

One afternoon, senior analyst James Vernon left MI5's HQ overlooking the River Thames and went to lunch with his assistant Gary Caldwell. As always on these hot days, they went to the outdoor Italian cafe nearby on the riverbank.
Vernon tried to take his mind off the task he and Caldwell were assigned first thing that morning. He had seen many frightening intelligence reports over the years, but none that compared to what had landed on his desk five hours ago.

"I can't stop thinking about it," Gary Caldwell said. “That report… is…
Vernon placed a hand on his young colleague's shoulder, trying to be supportive, but the gesture was indifferent. He could barely support himself. When he looked around, everything seemed normal, but he knew there had never been a day like this.
He and Caldwell, following their normal routine, ordered identical lunches: penne arrabiata accompanied by mineral water. After a few minutes, Vernon excused himself and went to the bathroom. Since three o'clock, he feeling unwell. Not in any specific way, in the sense that your whole life has been somehow wrong.

When he rubbed his hands together, he was disgusted by how sticky they were. At 5'11" and 170 pounds, he was an athletic man - current MI5 squash champion - and people often commented on how rarely he sweated, but now his shirt clung to him. Even though he was only in his thirties , he liked to portray the image of a tough, serene senior member of the Secret Service. His colleagues nicknamed him Captain Scarlet after the TV puppet character because of his blue eyes and short, neat black hair. Before three o'clock, he he thought he was as imperturbable and indestructible as the good captain, but it was a long time after three years and everything changed.

Trying to urinate, he failed to get a drop. He turned around, went to the sink, washed his hands, then looked in the mirror. Just for a second, he thought he caught a glimpse of his own ghost. F. Scott Fitzgerald's line flashed through his mind: In the real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning. Somehow he became the man who three hours.

He stood there, his hands shaking. Was he having a breakdown? More and more in your

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mind, the details of the intelligence report rewound itself.
Volcanologists around the world had reported a dramatic increase in volcanic activity. There were about 1,600 volcanoes around the world and they were
producing alarming signs of pre-eruption activity.
All of them.
Leaving the bathroom, Vernon made his way back to his desk. As he weaved between the tables, several things happened at once, almost obscuring each other so that when he later tried to remember the precise sequence, he couldn't.
All the lunchers, including Caldwell, had stopped eating and were looking up at the sky. Some were open-mouthed, others reaching for their mobile phones.

All along both banks of the Thames, thousands of Londoners and tourists stood perfectly still, their gaze fixed upward.
It took Vernon a moment to register that it was no longer sunny. Furthermore, he could now hear the strangest of sounds - an ear-grazing scream coming directly from above. Reflexively, he pressed his hands over his ears.
Caldwell, pushing back his chair, stood up and craned his neck upward. 'Jesus fucking Christ.
"The young man pointed the telephony image up and began taking images.
"There must be millions of them. I swear, the sky was empty a few seconds ago.

When he looked up at the sky, Vernon felt sick. The witch's curse had come to life. There, above, was a boiling black mass, like a bubbling cauldron.
Birds - sparrows, swallows, crows, rooks, seagulls, starlings, pigeons, rooks, buzzards, thrushes - were pushing and gathering in countless numbers. They were flying from all directions, huge formations of them, big V-shapes slicing through the air, screaming, yelling, cawing.
The sky, so blue a minute before, was now visibly pink in the few places where it could still be glimpsed through the bird formations, and was quickly turning redder.

“You'd better get back to HQ.” Vernon slapped a twenty-pound note on the table and he and Caldwell pushed their way through the crowd.
As they hurried past a store on their way back, Vernon stopped, caught his eye by a television in a window, showing the lunch news.
'Don't you recognize that? "He pointed to a building on the screen.
Caldwell shook his head.
'We need to hear what they're saying,' Vernon said, taking Caldwell inside.
'Axum is Ethiopia's holiest city,' a sweating reporter declared, 'and the building behind me is its holiest shrine. This spectacular little building is known as The Treasury, and has been the center of obsessive curiosity for decades. The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has refused to make a statement, but rumors are rife. What is certain is that the people of Axum are inconsolable. They are claiming that the strange phenomena being witnessed around the world in the last few hours are a direct consequence of this sacrilegious act.
‘Are you following any of this?’ Caldwell asked.
'Sshhh," said Vernon. On vacation last year, he had his photo taken outside the very now on-screen building. Like any tourist, he was dying to see what was inside, but that was something only allowed. the person who lived there

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permanently.
'Until we hear it officially from the authorities,' the reporter continued, 'I cannot say anything more about the alleged theft of the Western world's most potent religious symbol. Ethiopia's
claims to possess this holy of objects have always been controversial, but many experts have insisted
for

is persuasive evidence that this small building in Axum contained the sacred treasure.
'I do not believe that. "Vernon's three am feeling came back worse than ever.
"However, for now," the reporter concluded, "we are no closer to discovering whether it has truly been stolen. The entire world now anxiously awaits news of its fate... the legendary Ark of the Covenant."

2

Three days later

Situation Room, MI5 Headquarters, Thames House, London

Some people were in tears, others bowing their heads in prayer. James Vernon looked at the array of TV monitors that were showing photos coming in from all over the world. The Situation
Room, with over a hundred staff members crowded inside, was a bland, magnolia-painted space. Much of it resembled a call center filled with dozens of featureless booths and black
plastic seats. Huge screens on the front wall showed virtual simulations of the reality of whatever situation was the present focus of analysis.

Currently, several had stopped working and IT consultants were trying to resolve the issues. The TVs remained in full operation, although many people in the room wished they hadn't.

“God help us,” Caldwell groaned as a Breaking News signal crossed the Sky news feed. A ticker tape message ran along the bottom of the screen saying: Vatican confirms death of Pope. Time of
global crisis. Election of new Pope to take place immediately. Sacred College of Cardinals
already set up in the Sistine Chapel.

Vernon puts his hand on his head. He wasn't Catholic, but somehow this news was more devastating than the rest. Hours earlier, he had seen the Pope giving a speech in front of millions of stunned people packed into St. Peter's Square. Unlike the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States, the Pope had managed to capture the mood of the world. While the politicians spoke of facts and figures and practical measures to be taken, the Pope spoke of his own fragility, his private fears, of how he could barely bear the thought of the suffering being endured by so many.

"This is humanity's night in Gethsemane," he said. "Our Golgotha is certainly not very far away. Only God can save us now." Then one of his aides handed him a note. As soon as I looked at him, the Pope
fell, clutching his heart. The Vatican still refused to disclose the contents of the note.

Vernon shuddered. Only God can save us now. Days ago he would have laughed, but now he

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he felt as if he was on his knees to pray like so many others who arrive in churches, temples, synagogues and mosques around the world. "Our sins have brought this punishment upon us," religious leaders were saying. According to atheists, it was a freak combination of natural disasters caused by worsening global warming, but even they were running in fear. They whispered of tipping points being passed, of possible THEM: Extinction Level Events. Just a different way of saying what the holy men had already pronounced - maybe the end of the world was really happening.

It now seemed bizarre that people were so slow to respond to the first signal three days earlier. They all experienced the "am three event" as it was being called, but everyone ignored it. Then animals everywhere on the planet started behaving strangely, running around in all directions, calving and whining. It wasn't just some animals - it was all of them. Cats, dogs, horses, lions, elephants, mice, reptiles, insects, the whole list: stampeding, running, running, running away, trying desperately to find what refuge they could. People still tried to pretend there was nothing to worry about. It was only when swarms of birds appeared over the cities that it became impossible to deny something catastrophic was happening.

As one of MI5's high-level intelligence analysts, James Vernon was seconded to an emergency team that included his most talented MI6 colleagues and high-security clearance experts from leading universities. Over the past three days, he and his colleagues had gone through classified reports from British agents in all parts of the world. It was his job to collate all the data, summarize it and present it to MI5 and MI6 decision makers.

A week earlier, he had thought that he was at the top of his game, that fast-track career opportunities to the top of the organization were lining up for him. Now, he doubted he would see his thirty-first birthday. He felt so exhausted, mentally and physically. There was a security shutdown and no one had been allowed to leave the building for the last 36 hours.

He caught a few intermittent hours of sleep in the break room, but it wasn't enough. The general director had sanctioned the use of amphetamines to combat fatigue.

Vernon looked around at his colleagues. Everyone was as disheveled as he was. The sour stench of body odor was everywhere. Even the women, normally impeccably turned out, had abandoned their hygiene routines.

'Coffee? Caldwell asked.
Vernon nodded. He had a habit of stretching his legs every half hour: anything to avoid looking at the data on his computer and the images on the TVs.

The two men went to the vending machine and each chose a strong black coffee.
In the old days, they would have gone to the window and admired the view over the River Thames whilst sipping their drinks. Now the blinds were permanently drawn. No one in their right mind would enjoy

looking at what was outside. Without speaking, the two analysts sipped their drinks and headed in the opposite direction, towards the small room adjacent to the Situation Room.
"We can't keep running," Vernon said, stopping abruptly.

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Caldwell looked at him. Just twenty-two years old and fresh from Cambridge University, the young man was already impressing as an analyst. At 6'4", he cut an awkward figure, famous for his ill-fitting suits, but no one doubted his ability.

As they made their way back to the window, several of their colleagues watched them. Vernon pulled the cord to open the curtains.
'What does he think he's doing?' One of the analysts grumbled.
Even though it was a spring afternoon, no light entered the room, only a vibrating darkness. The birds were there, just as they had been for the last three days, walking around in circles. It was as if they were trying to find a place of safety, but always failing. So they continued to fly. Many fell dead from the sky, exhausted. All air traffic had to be suspended; no planes could fly through the swarms. The floor was covered in bird droppings. On the first day, authorities tried to clean it up immediately. On the second day, they gave up. The smell was terrible. Thousands of dead birds rotted in their own excrement on every street.

Buzzards that flew to northern Spain took a liking to the Gothic buildings along the Thames and settled on the rooftops like medieval gargoyles. But it was the crows that made people nervous, looking as if they came straight from hell. As it flew low over people's homes, they stared with dead, black eyes at anyone who dared look back.

Vernon tapped his fingers against the triple-paned windows, relieved that it effectively blocked out the sound of the outside world. Some people claimed they would get used to the noise - the never-ending noise of bird calls - just as they had to airplane noise in the past, but he wasn't one of them.
Jesus!
He backed away as a black object came heading towards the window. At the last moment, he ducked. A crow crashed into the center and disintegrated. Mush ran down the window. The raven's blood matched the strange new color of the London sky. In the brief moments when it appeared through the gaps in the bird mass, it cast a sick, rust-colored light over the city that caused headaches, nausea, and migraines to reach epidemic proportions. At sunrise and sunset, the light was particularly eerie, forming large impressionistic colorful strokes across the sky as if a mad artist was at work.

“Close the damn curtains,” a woman snapped.
Vernon pulled the cord and turned around, his discomfort worse than ever. "I bet you're glad your wife and baby are far away from all this," Caldwell said. 'Sweden, isn't it?'

"That's right." Vernon was confident there was no safer place on earth than the island of Björkö, 18 miles from Stockholm, where Anna was living on a farm with baby Louise. But it wasn't a recent move: Anna left six months ago. 'What about you?' he asked. 'No girlfriend waiting for you somewhere? "In all the time he had spent with Caldwell, Vernon had never once asked his colleague about his private life.

The response was typically terse. "Nobody special.
Speaking was difficult for everyone. The whole of Thames House had fallen into a peculiar calm.

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Voices, when they were heard at all, rarely rose above a whisper. Volume controls on TV monitors were rejected so that people could barely hear what was being said. Everyone preferred it that way.

The two men finished their coffees and returned to their tables. Vernon found it impossible to concentrate. When governments realized they could not hide what was happening, then, for better or worse, they let the media floodgates open, and now one grotesque image quickly followed another.

Vernon glanced at the space on his desk, where the framed portrait of his wife and baby once took pride of place. Now put it in the back of your drawer. The future was all he thought about when Louise was born eight months ago. Now he wondered if she had one: if someone did. At least Louise was too young to understand.

He kept a second photograph, this one in his drawer, as far out of reach as he could. It wasn't his wife or son's. The image of a ghost, perhaps - one that had haunted their marriage from the beginning.

Reluctantly, he focused on the TV images. He never gets some of those images out of his mind. Two days earlier, a series of apocalyptic earthquakes hit Turkey, destroying forty percent of the country. Istanbul was in ruins. Millions were killed, their mutilated bodies lying in open view, as the overwhelmed emergency services dug ditches to bury the corpses. In some places, bodies were gathered into mountainous heaps and set on fire.

In Southeast Asia, two Tsunamis, triggered by large underwater earthquakes, struck one after the other. Most people managed to escape the first one, but not the second one. No one dared to estimate the death toll.
Then reports
came from Thailand saying of people who are healthy at lunchtime but died at noon. They complained of nothing more than a sudden intense cold, but virulent bird flu was soon diagnosed, the start of the lethal pandemic experts had feared for so long. Despite attempts to impose quarantine zones, it was spreading rapidly across Asia. It wouldn't be long until it reached Europe.

Everyone knew it was just the beginning. The most obvious sign was the sky. All over the world, it changed color, turning to the blood red now so familiar to Londoners. The history books said
there hadn't been anything like it since Krakatoa in 1883. That volcanic eruption produced the highest sounds ever recorded by man. The veil of dust that threw it into the sky

blocked out so much sun that the global temperature was reduced by 1.2 degrees Celsius. The deflection of light from suspended dust particles changed the color of the sky for months. Normal time has been disrupted for years. A sideshow, apparently, compared to what was happening now.

South of the Equator, storms covering hundreds of square miles were violent, lit by lightning so fierce that U.S. weather monitoring planes said they looked like detonating atomic bombs. The video images they transmitted to TV stations were extraordinary. It felt like weather systems from hell had come to earth.

Vernon closed his eyes and gripped the edge of the table. As a child, whenever something in the

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TV scared him, his parents told him that if he closed his eyes, the "monsters" would disappear. Not in the adult world: here, they just got bigger and appeared ever narrower.
He heard a scream and hesitantly opened his eyes. Everyone was still looking at the screens, but all the monitors now showed the same image - a yellow screen
printed with three flashing red letters: UGT. It was the first time in history
that it had happened. Vernon swiveled in his chair and looked at the analysts behind him. They were as surprised as he was. UGT was known as the "Word of God" because no one was sure if he really existed, and he only appeared when it was time to say his prayers.

'Now it's official,' Gary Caldwell murmured.
Vernon swallowed. It was official right: Global Threat unspecified.

3

'Jover the
tannoy. Ames Vernon, please go to the holding cells immediately," said a voice

Vernon stood up from his seat, grabbed his suit jacket from the hanger, and headed for the door. All around him, UGT kept blinking. The UGT protocols could be declared only if all the world's governments agreed because it meant that each service had to share its secrets with its rivals to combat the common danger - usually expected to be an extraterrestrial threat of some kind.
Vernon shook his head. Once you let others see your secrets, that was it. Now, requests from all over the world would be coming in, asking for access to the highest
security files, the "black" files, forbidden to everyone,
but
Older MI5 and MI5 personnel would be doing exactly the same in reverse.
As he walked along one of the endless corridors in Thames House, heading to the central elevator block, Vernon wished the building wasn't so big.
Built in 1930, it had two symmetrical wings connected by a connecting block, and visitors often worry about getting lost. The miles of runners kept people in shape, that was for sure.
With its riverside location and

Neoclassical architectural style, Thames House was once described as "the finest office building in the British Empire. Its elegant facade was made of Portland stone, decorated with various fine carvings. It is not a building we normally associate with the secret services, but the perfect stage, Vernon thought, for the somber announcements that would surely be made in the next day or two.
The bulletproof windows in the hallways do not benefit from blinds. Normally, Vernon ran past, but now he stopped, morbidly drawn to look at what London had become.
The streets were deserted. It was scary how quickly the city had gone
from metropolis to ghost town. Although Europe and North America were largely untouched by natural disasters, normal life had come to a halt until here.

Most Londoners fled their places of work, just as the birds appeared and never returned, the stock market suffered the biggest crash in history, and the transport system was crushed. For the first time, the Government responded quickly,

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using an emergency plan drawn up years earlier in anticipation of
London suffering a catastrophic terrorist attack. Within 36 hours, military and police control was completely established. Only a skeleton metro service operated now, and it stopped at 8am when the curfew began.

Army
convoys rolled through the empty streets. By virtue of the Government's emergency powers, all major utilities - gas, electricity, water, telephone, fuel - were brought under central control until further notice, and key personnel were being required to work whether they liked it or not. Tanks and barricades surrounded Parliament, and similar arrangements were made in all major civic and administrative buildings. Most radio and TV programs have been cancelled, replaced by constant news.
Newspapers were still being produced, but probably not for long.

It was only natural, Vernon thought, that people wanted to be with their families at a time like this, those lucky enough to have them. Most of those still at work had nowhere else to go.

At first, the director general ordered all team members to remain at their posts. Soldiers prevented anyone from leaving, but some people became hysterical, begging to be allowed to go home to their families. For practical reasons, the DG relented, there was simply no point in trying to get productive work out of staff no longer mentally fit for duty. Most family types were allowed to leave. A handful, determined to do their duty, stayed behind. Virtually all of the team's non-registered deputies volunteered to stay.

Vernon asked if he should have tried to get to Sweden, but he didn't want to spend his last hours with the woman he didn't love, and seeing baby Louise would make him unbearably sad. There was only one person he wanted to be with at a time like this, but there was no chance of that special meeting happening.

Six crows swooped down and sat on the window sill, looking at him. He knocked on the window to scare them, but they didn't move.
Making his way down the hallway, once again, he swore he tripped over piles of trash – mostly potato chip packets, chocolate, and Coca-Cola can wrappers.

Conditions at Thames House had deteriorated rapidly. Bins hadn't been emptied for a few days. The bathrooms were in poor condition, many blocked and leaking. Everything in the entire building stank.

The hallways were practically deserted. A couple of days earlier, activity was frantic, with everyone rushing back and forth from one emergency meeting to the next. Not now. In a way, Vernon was happy.
Several times, he bumped into people in tears, and he was at a loss as to what to do.
Comfort them? Ignore them? Tell them to get a grip? Tell bad jokes? Nothing felt right.

He was surprised at how many beautiful women were left. When he was a teenager, he always imagined that if he was told the world was ending, he would find as many beautiful women as possible for sex. Now, he realized,

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no one would be having sex like the world ended. Impending extinction wasn't just any kind of turn-on.

When he was about to enter the elevator, he received a call on his mobile phone.

Caldwell informed him that within seconds of declaring UGT, identical requests had come from three completely different sources. Everyone wanted an obscure document called The Cainite Destiny. It was the identity of the three intelligence organizations that was so intriguing - the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, Bundesrichtendienst, the German foreign intelligence service, and Sodalício Pianum, the Vatican's top-secret intelligence service.

"The Vatican, the Israelis and the Germans? Vernon blurted out. 'What the hell is this document all they want?'

'I'm looking at our entry database right now,' Caldwell replied.
"Says
The Cainite Destiny is a single page from a diary. It was written in 1938 and came into our possession at the end of World War II. Only three people have accessed it since then. Two of them were general directors, and that was several years ago. decades. The third was your boss: 24 hours ago'.

'He is sure?'
'That's what the database says.'
'What is the high-level description of this document?
'The Destiny Cainite was handwritten in German by one of Heinrich Himmler's high-ranking aides. The British army arrested him after the German surrender in 1945. According to our database, this document gives an inexplicable version of Nazi ideology, based on the occult. The teacher analyzed the document and said that its implications were terrifying. His interpretation was rejected. However, the document was given the highest possible security classification as it was feared it was

a coded reference to a Nazi plot that may be resurrected by neo-Nazis at a future date.

There was a long pause. Vernon asked why Caldwell had stopped talking. "What is that? '

"Listen to this. The reason the document is called The Cainite Destiny is that it suggests a direct relationship between Nazism and the biblical figure of Cain." He hesitated again. "And there's one more thing."

The Nazis and Cain? Vernon shook his head. Hokum. Why are three of the best intelligence services in the world giving something like this even the slightest credit? And why has his
boss been looking at him so recently? "Come on," he said. 'I don't have time to mess around. What's the last thing? "
'Lord, who predicts the end of the world. "
Vernon swallowed. Once, those words seemed so abstract. One day, they were sure to come true. He just didn't expect it to be in his own life.
He pressed the button to call the elevator. While waiting, he studied the MI5 crest above the elevator doors, showing a combination of gold, sea lion wings on a blue background, six red roses, three five-pointed green cinquefoil heraldic flowers, and three portcullises. The crest also displayed MI5's motto: Regnum Defende - Defend the Realm. Now, Vernon doesn't

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know what he was defending him from. Did Hitler arrive from the grave?
When the elevator doors opened, Vernon was surprised to see old Harry, the veteran elevator operator.
Still in his pristine bottle-green uniform, Old Harry had not abandoned any of his normal habits.

'Good afternoon, sir.' Old Harry looked at Vernon's badge.
Vernon couldn't believe he was still having his identity checked. Perhaps it was comforting: the world hadn't completely disappeared into pieces, if elderly Harry was still following the rules. He had had the same problem spraying

the elevator with

With

fresheners - a welcome relief from the sour smell that permeated the building.
Vernon entered and the doors swooshed shut. "What's the floor?" Elderly Harry asked.
"Basement".

"You're right, sir.
Vernon couldn't help but see himself in the elevator mirror. An exhausted man looked back, with black rings around his eyes, a gaunt face, a rumpled suit and crooked tie. He picked up a comb and tried to tidy himself up.
The elevator stopped and the doors opened again. The girl entered, wiping her eyes.
Vernon looked away. They had had a casual fling on a training course in Cardiff six months earlier. Another ghost from the past.
"Well, they don't recognize me," she replied.
That's all I need, Vernon thought as he awkwardly walked past her into the reception area of the detention block.

'Good luck' Old Harry said as the elevator doors closed.

Vernon nodded half-heartedly, then watched as the changing lights on the panel above the elevator doors showed the elevator making its way to the top floor. It wouldn't be long before the elevators were shut down; Too much of a drain on the building's limited electricity. MI5 and MI6 had already taken themselves off the National Grid and were using their own generators to ensure they did not suffer power cuts. Soon everyone would be wandering up and down stairs.

He placed his smartcard against the electronic reader and pushed it through the turnstile.
Glancing at the security guard, he noticed that the man was holding a set
of Catholic rosary beads. He tried to think of something to say, but nothing came. Normally he would comment on football, but every game had been canceled and that seemed pointless now.

'Sir', the guard said once he had gone past.
Vernon stopped and turned around. 'Yes?'
The guard moved. 'Sorry, nothing. It's just... "" What? "
'Can't you feel it? Since bringing this man...
"What man? '
"Isn't that why you're here?" The guard lowered his head and returned to count his rosary beads.

Vernon shrugged and headed for the coffee machine. The world was full of riddles these days. He needed something to wake him up before the next shock arrived. It wouldn't take long to judge what the guard had said. The cells were definitely not a place for gatherings of innocents.

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He would rather have stayed in the Situation Room. There was so much new
work to be done now that the UGT had been called. Strange times require strange procedures. The computer programs would search databases for all documents that mentioned words like Armageddon, Apocalypse, End of the World, Doomsday, Extinction, End of Time, Judgment Day. Analysts would be examining the prophecies by every nut and mystic. Even an old favorite like Nostradamus, debased or not, would be back in the picture. It was the moment when the secret services gave credence to the supernatural. Not because they believed anyone, but because there was nothing left to go on. And these programs will no doubt soon locate The Cainite Destiny. He hoped that he will have the opportunity to study it.

He vaguely remembered something about Godwin's Law having a habit of clipping itself everywhere. The exact wording, if he remembered right, was: 'As an online discussion grows larger, the likelihood of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one -.
Certainty "The same was obviously true of apocalyptic predictions.
Maybe it wasn't so strange that the supernatural was being taken seriously. Since the first day of the New Year, newspapers have been reminding their readers that the Mayans long ago predicted that the world would end on December 21, 2012. It started out as a bit of a joke, one of the "things to look out for." this year, but no one was laughing now. On top of that, the only notable thing that

What happened immediately before the chaos descended was the series of spectacular robberies that had grabbed worldwide attention, apparently occurring at precisely that three o'clock moment when the entire planet shook.
The Treasury in Axum was just one of seven high-profile locations raided by specialized thieves. It soon became apparent that they were looking for very particular, highly prized artifacts, all of a religious nature. Religious leaders were openly saying that these thefts were the cause of natural disasters. They were the ultimate insult to God, according to them, forcing him to decide that humanity must be purged, just as in the original final days of Noah's Flood.

Hysterical nonsense, Vernon thought, but there was always a flicker of doubt.
After all, not only had the thieves apparently stolen the Ark of the Covenant,
they were also said to have found perhaps the most elusive treasure of them all.

The Holy Grail.

4

Ernon wasn't sure what he was expecting when he arrived at the detention area, but it wasn't that.
These cells had not been used in rabies for years; Prisoners these days were taken to the high-security police unit at Paddington Green.

Soldiers in camouflage uniforms were everywhere. There was a strange atmosphere: the soldiers silent and visibly agitated. Normally, soldiers could be relied upon for their dark humor. Not these.
Whoever the prisoner was was a mystery, his presence had frightened them.

Vernon was starting to feel the same way. He imagined that a terrorist

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had been apprehended, someone who needed to be questioned immediately. His boss probably wanted him to provide detailed background intelligence on the prisoner, to try to figure out his movements over the last twenty-four hours, figure out who was helping him, and so on. Perhaps the terrorist tried to take advantage of the
current chaos to stage a 'spectacular'.

When he reached the battleship-gray block that contained the detention cells and interview rooms, a soldier inspected his identification badge.
'Commander Harrington is waiting for you in Room One, said the soldier. He was nervous, eyes darting around.
‘For all the extra security?’ asked Vernon.
"You'll find out soon enough." The soldier knocked on the iron door. A second soldier looked through a viewing slit, then opened the door.
Vernon entered the main detention block with its austere walls and worn black and white mosaic tiles, his uneasiness accelerating rapidly. He loosened his tie.

The soldier who greeted him was nervous and tense. He followed Vernon to the main interview room, knocked, then punched in a security code to open the door.

The first thing Vernon noticed as he entered the room was the polished black table in the center, at which two men were sitting. One was his pin-stripe-suited, fifty-year-old boss Charles Harrington, the other a black man wearing the uniform of a colonel in the US Marine Corps, and with a grave cut typically military
crew.

The American stood up and extended his hand. "I'm Colonel Brad Gresnick from the Defense Intelligence Agency. I just came from the Pentagon.
Vernon looked at him. A clean cut type, probably in his mid-thirties years, the
Colonel was over six feet tall and about 190 pounds, with a muscular build. Vernon didn't like to acknowledge him, but Gresnick was a dead ringer for Hollywood's top black heartthrob actor Jez Easton. Immediately, he felt an urge to put Gresnick down. A by-the-numbers soldier, he decided, rather a man who would do anything to get on the suet dick.

Vernon was not a fan of DIA, having worked with them a couple of times before. They were the military counterparts of the CIA, responsible for collecting foreign military intelligence, analyzing military threats to the United States, making sure the American Armed Forces were ready for any eventuality.

They provided the Secretary of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff with all the information needed to make decisions. Vernon found pedantic, CIA talent lacking. What was one of his men doing here at a time like this?

"I thought all flights were grounded because of the birds," Vernon said. "Military flights have special equipment to disperse them.
Gresnick resumed his seat.

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"Sit down, Mr. Vernon," Commander Harrington said. "We have a lot to get through."
Setting down his coffee, Vernon sat down across from the others.
Countless documents were placed on the table, all with 'Classified: Eyes Only' stamps. Next to the paperwork, sitting on a black cloth, was a translucent, emerald green globe the size of a tennis ball.
A paperweight of some kind, Vernon thought. Finally, there was a small microphone.

'Why not bring Mr. Vernon up to speed, Colonel? " said Harrington. Gresnick nodded. "Four days ago, the thirty men of our top Delta Force unit defected from their base at Fort Bragg. Within twenty-four hours, one of our analysts discovered an extraordinary and previously unknown connection between them all. Without exception, they were grandchildren of members of Section 5, a World War II military intelligence unit. In April and May 1945, Section 5 interrogated Nazi officials responsible for part of the vast treasure hoard the Nazis looted from across Europe. These treasures

Private Nazi care was of an esoteric religious nature, and were stored in bunkers deep inside Nuremberg Castle.
"That's quite a story. Vernon realized he was going to have trouble avoiding the Nazis today.

'All these Delta Force guys were single and childless,' Gresnick said. 'Before they defected, they sold their homes and withdrew all the money from their bank accounts.
Vernon had no idea what this had to do with MI5. Intriguing, certainly, but it seemed like an internal problem within the American Army, of trivial importance given world events.

"You're probably wondering what the joke is," Gresnick said. "There is no doubt that you are aware of the recent thefts of religious artifacts from various sites around the world."

Vernon nodded. Three of the seven locations were in the British Isles.
'The DIA concluded that all the robberies bore the characteristics of US Special Forces operations - unauthorized, I must emphasize. We are sure these defectors were responsible.

Vernon sat down. "Why did American Special Forces go rogue and start stealing religious relics?

Gresnick slid a folder to Vernon.
"Finish your coffee and take a few minutes to read this file. I think I can safely say that it's the strangest document you've ever read.

5

Defense Intelligence Agency
Eyes Only: Classifieds
For movement between Sigma Access Group only

Alpha Summary - alleged theft of iconic religious artifacts as hypothetical cause of current global environmental instability.

Beta Summary: On April 24, 2012, at 03:00 GMT, seven locations are said to be associated with three

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Famous religious relics were raided. All attacks were synchronized and took place under cover of darkness. Within hours of the attacks, reports came across the world of cataclysmic earthquakes, an alarming increase in volcanic activity, formation of several Category 5 hurricanes, and acute weather conditions in nearly every country. The color of the sky across the land was observed to begin changing to blood red.

Religious leaders declared the robberies blasphemy and the direct cause of natural disasters. They demanded the safe return of the treasures and stated that otherwise the world would suffer the 'wrath of God.

All governments agreed that the severity of natural disasters posed an unprecedented threat to the future of life on Earth. The United Nations met in an emergency session to coordinate a global response. It was decided a two-track approach should be adopted. While scientific solutions were urgently sought, governments at least paid lip service to the possibility of the current crisis having a supernatural origin. To prevent possible religious hysteria from breaking out among billions of believers, the governments of all the great powers agreed to use their intelligence services to arrest the thieves and recover the stolen artifacts.

At present, scientists have been unable to explain the pattern of extreme environmental events. Investigations, analysis and data collection are ongoing. Emergency conferences involving the world's leading scientific experts have been organized and full support will be given from all governments. Religious leaders will also be consulted on ways forward. As a matter of public morals, it is critical that governments be seen to be taking all possible courses of action at this time.

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(His Eminence Cardinal Thomas Lenihan of the Archdiocese of New York and Rabbi Dr. Menachem Grien, Professor of Theology at Columbia University, were consulted in the preparation of the following).

The three sacred relics said to be connected with the seven attacks are the most famous in Western religious history: 1) The Ark of the
Covenant 2) The Holy
Grail.
3) The Spear of Destiny.

The seven invaded locations are:

1) Temple Mount, in Jerusalem.
2) The Church of Saint Mary of Zion, Axum, Ethiopia.
3) Chalice Well, Glastonbury, na Inglaterra.
4) Schatzkammer (Imperial Treasury), Hofburg Palace, Vienna, Austria.

5) Oak Island, Nova Scotia, Canada.
6) Rosslyn Chapel, Edinburgh, Scotland.
7) Hill of Tara, Republic of Ireland.

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Brief descriptions of the three artifacts are provided below:

1) The Ark of the Covenant
A portable wooden container, the size of a large box and covered with gold on the inside. According to the Book of Exodus, God commanded Moses to

make the Ark and equipped it with a precise set of instructions. The Ark was the container for the two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. The Ark was mentioned many times in the Old Testament before suddenly disappearing. Several conflicting theories about his fate and current whereabouts have been proposed.
In the present context, it is important to highlight that the Ark was considered to have many dangerous properties, including the characteristics of an early weapon of mass destruction.
The following is a list of abilities attributed to Ark: 1) Levitation: could lift itself and other objects close to the ground. 2) emission of light and sparks.

3) He had a flamethrower capability, which he allegedly used to kill the two sons of Aaron, the first high priest of the Ark. 4) was associated with a cloud of fire that materialized above her and from which a voice spoke to Moses and Aaron.

5) It can induce leprosy and tumors in people.
6) Those who touched it without permission, even if accidentally, usually died. Ordinary people could not safely approach within half a mile of it.

7) During battles, he rose into the air, made a terrifying sound and rushed into the center of the enemy army. In one battle, he reportedly killed 50,000 enemy soldiers.

8) During the siege of Jericho, Jewish priests circulated in the city on seven separate days. Some priests blew trumpets as they went around the city walls, while others carried the Ark in procession using special poles so that they did not come into direct contact with it. It is speculated that the Ark may have amplified and directed the sound waves like a sonic cannon, eventually bringing down the walls of Jericho.

9) The High Priest had to wear special protective clothing when he approached the Ark 10) When the Ark killed
Hebrews, Moses insisted that their bodies be taken away from the Israelites' camp to be buried, contrary to normal religious practice. No explanation has been offered as to why Moses took these extraordinary precautions.

11) The Ark was said to emit a dazzling supernatural glow.

2) The Holy Grail
Generally defined as the chalice used by Christ at the Last Supper. This event supposedly took place in the home of Joseph of Arimathea, who may have been Jesus' uncle.
Supposedly, Joseph used the cup to catch a few drops of the blood shed by Jesus at the crucifixion, and the blood was said to be

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miraculously preserved in the glass. Another legend says that the cup was

originally made for Abraham, the great patriarch of the Hebrew People. Like the Ark of the Covenant, the Grail was said to emit an otherworldly glow.
Other theories say that the Grail is a dish, a stone, a person (Mary Magdalene), the head of Jesus, the skeleton of Jesus, or even Jesus' lineage after his supposed marriage to Mary Magdalene and
birth of a daughter. As with the Ark, several conflicting theories have been proposed about its fate and current whereabouts.

3) The Spear of Destiny A
Roman centurion thrust this spear into the side of Christ as he was nailed to the cross. The spear was highly prized, and many powerful figures throughout history went out of their way to possess it, including several emperors of the Holy Roman Empire and Adolf Hitler.

It became a museum piece and was put on display in a prestigious palace in Vienna as part of the Imperial Regalia of the Holy Roman Empire. Note that the Holy Roman Empire is sometimes
referred to as the First Reich.
Bismarck created the Second Reich and Hitler ruled the Third Reich.

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Brief descriptions of the seven locations that were raided are provided below:

1) Temple Mount, Jerusalem Temple Mount
contains secret underground passages that belonged to Solomon's original Temple and survived
the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

The attackers on April 24 blew open one of the closed tunnels using plastic explosives. There is evidence that the explosives were detonated using timers. However, there is no indication that any tunnel entrance was found or that anything was removed. The Israeli Defense Force has cordoned off the area, and no
one is being granted access. No further investigations are possible at this time.

Riots broke out in Jerusalem within minutes of the explosions, with Muslims accusing Jews of trying to blow up the Dome of the Rock - one of Islam's holiest sites. The gold-domed
mosque is built on the ruins of the Temple of Solomon and the later Temple of Herod.

2) Treasury of the Church of Saint Mary of Zion, Axum, Ethiopia Axum is
Ethiopia's holiest city and the Church of Saint Mary of Zion its holiest church. The Treasury, a separate building located just behind the church, was said to house the Ark of the Covenant, supposedly taken there by Menelik I, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. (Menelik means 'son of the wise man', and the ancient kingdom of Sheba is believed to have incorporated Ethiopia.) A monk known as the Guardian of the Ark

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protected from the ark at all times. He was shot dead during the attack. Ethiopian authorities do not allow investigators to enter the Treasury. They refused to confirm that the object claimed to be the Ark of the Covenant had been taken.

3) Chalice Well, Glastonbury, England
Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea was arrested after the death of Jesus.
When he was freed, he fled the Holy Land and took the Holy Grail to the safe haven of Glastonbury, England. He hid the Grail at the bottom of the chalice at the foot of Glastonbury Tor, a sacred mountain overlooking the city of Glastonbury. The water from the well is dyed red and is reputed to have healing powers. The 24 April invaders climbed into the well and took away a portion of the pit wall, revealing a small, rust-free iron chamber, hitherto unknown. There is no indication that, if anything, they discovered it.

4) Schatzkammer (Imperial Treasury), Hofburg Palace, Vienna, Austria The Schatzkammer houses the Imperial Regalia of the Holy Roman Empire: the European empire created by Charlemagne and dissolved centuries later by Napoleon Bonaparte. The only item stolen from the treasure collection was the so-called Spear of Destiny. All alarm systems and CCTV cameras at Hofburg Palace were deactivated during the attack. A top-secret tranquilizing gas knocked out security guards. Only United States and United Kingdom Special Forces are known to have access to this gas.

5) Oak Island, Nova Scotia, Canada
A small remote island off the east coast of Canada, virtually uninhabited, and renowned for being the site of a vast, inaccessible, buried treasure located at the bottom of a trapped, intricately constructed 200 meter deep vertical shaft known as the Money Pit . Originally, pirates were thought to have buried the treasure; Captain Kidd and Blackbeard are the most likely candidates.

However, some experts said the pirates did not have the engineering skills to build such a complex structure. Leonardo Da Vinci has been mentioned as a possible designer of the well. Other theories claim that Freemasons
or the
Knights Templar created. After the forced detention of the Knights Templar in 1307, the leaders of the Order who managed to escape capture gave instructions
for their treasure to be hidden from their enemies. He was removed by the ships of the Templar fleet and disappeared from history. Some accounts say it included the Holy Grail and the Ark of the Covenant. Several experts believe that the
Templars discovered America before Columbus, and that the Templar fleet possibly went to North America to bury the treasure.
The raiders on Oak Island seemed to know exactly how to access the Money Pit. The previously unknown route through the traps was unmarked, leading
to a large underground, waterproofed chamber, the walls of which

which were carved with swastikas, many hundreds of years ago. A pair of Roman coins were discovered near the well's mouth. The coins were from ancient Judea, with one side showing the head of Emperor Tiberius and the reverse showing the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.
On a tombstone near the Money Pit is an inscription in Latin: I tego arcana Dei

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meaning Go away! I hide the secrets of God.

6) Rosslyn Chapel, Edinburgh, Scotland Rosslyn
Chapel was built between 1446 and 1486 and is often described as the most mysterious Christian chapel in the world. Like Oak Island, Rosslyn is related to the lost treasure of the Knights Templar, including the Holy Grail and the Ark of the Covenant.
Many Templars fled to Scotland in the years after 1307, because the Scottish king, Robert the Bruce, having been excommunicated for killing a rival in a church, was not bound by the papal decree to suppress the Templars. Several experts believe that the Templars regrouped in Scotland and eventually emerged in a new guise - the Freemasons. Informed speculation says that Freemasonry originated specifically in Rosslyn.

The Rosslyn invaders disabled all of the chapel's alarm systems and CCTV monitors. As in the Schatzkammer, the security guards were rendered unconscious by tranquilizing gas. The invaders removed a portion of the crypt's wall, revealing a stone chamber of considerable size. There is no indication that, if anything, they discovered it.

7) Hill of Tara, Republic of Ireland Most
sacred site in ancient Ireland, where the High Kings of Ireland were crowned. Legend has it that the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ireland for safekeeping after the destruction of King Solomon's Temple, burying it somewhere on the Hill of Tara.

The attackers used an excavator stolen from a nearby construction site to dig a trench several meters away from a feature known as the hostage mound. The large bronze chamber was exposed. It is not known whether
the robbers found anything.

Conclusions

The attackers at each location used similar methods. The top-secret tranquilizer gas used at two of the sites indicates the involvement of US or UK Special Forces. Thirty
American special forces personnel went AWOL on April 23. It seems likely that these individuals were responsible for the attacks.

The attackers clearly had access to secret information about each site. However, the only object that has definitively disappeared is the Spear of Destiny from the Hofburg Palace in
Vienna.

There is speculation about whether the robbers also recovered anything that could be described as the Holy Grail or the Ark of the Covenant, or any other religious treasures. It is not known whether the robbers found a particular religious relic in each of the seven locations, or whether they were looking for the same objects in different locations. However, given their detailed knowledge, it is likely that the robbers knew exactly what they would find at each location. On the other hand, it is possible that they carried out some fake thefts to create confusion and mask their true intentions (the attack on the Temple Mount might be an example). They were looking for publicity, targeting high-profile websites

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profile? By their actions on the Temple Mount, were they seeking to generate unrest between Jews and Muslims? No liability claims have been issued.

The blood of Jesus Christ is an obvious connection between the Holy Grail and the Spear of Destiny, and these two items are historically considered to be two of the four

so-called Hallows Grails. These four objects appear in the legends of King Arthur and the Holy Grail and are said to have enormous power, especially when brought together. The other two Grail Relics are a sword and a plate. There is no known connection between the Grail Relics and the Ark of the Covenant. The Hallows are associated with the Christian New Testament, while the latter is an Old Testament and, specifically Jewish, sacred artifact.

Ark, by reputation, is a potential WMD. The Spear of Destiny supposedly bestows great power upon its owner. The Holy Grail is said to
be the goal of humanity's ultimate spiritual quest. The Hallows Grail, as a collection, supposedly possesses unprecedented power.
Do these fabulous religious relics have the capacity to be the centerpieces of some hitherto unsuspected Armageddon conspiracy? Cardinal Lenihan and Rabbi Grien agree that they do. Prominent scientists have ridiculed this notion, but at this time it has failed to explain the current global crisis, and they have given no suggestions as to what should be done.

REPORT ENDS

6

Ernon placed the document back on the table. Well, Gresnick wasn't exaggerating. Days ago, he would have considered that
everyone involved in preparing this report was nuts. Now, he didn't know what to think. Crazy things were happening everywhere and no one had any answers.
It was the duty of the intelligence services to follow all possible leads. In a strange way, Sherlock Holmes' formula was the right one: "When you have eliminated
all that is impossible, then what remains, however improbable, must be the truth.
"If there were no credible leads, you had to

Look at the far-fetched ones, and they don't come much more far-fetched than the theory described in Gresnick's paper.

"Let me get this straight, Colonel," said Vernon. 'THE DAY are claiming that just a few days ago an elite special forces unit deserted en masse and
became - how shall I say - Tomb Raider, or Raiders of the Lost Ark? And now their activities may have brought down, um, the wrath of God upon us. "
"That's as good a way of putting it as any. We think all the defectors are now in the UK... southwest England, to be precise. "
Vernon turned to Harrington but his boss's blank expression signaled that he also didn't know what the hell he was listening to.
Vernon couldn't understand. Why do Delta Force defectors steal holy relics?
And what were they doing in southwest England? It was a part of the country he was more than familiar with, and it certainly wasn't the place where you'd expect
to find renegade US Special Forces.

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"I'm sorry," he said, wondering why Gresnick was now, in turn, exchanging a meaningful look with Harrington. 'This is a very big responsibility within'
“There are some other things I need to throw into the mix,” Gresnick said. "Two of the deserters were detained in London last night by their CO19 group of armed police officers. They had detailed maps of the south-west of England in their possession. They were caught in one of the reading rooms of the
British Library, after breaking into much amateurish, almost as if they wanted to be discovered. When CO19 found them, they were studying microfiche of rare manuscripts.
They are being held in the cells next door."

"The British Library? Vernon consulted. 'Microfiche of what?'
Gresnick and Harrington again exchanged glances, but did not respond. "Other than what it says in the document you just read," Gresnick said, 'What else do you know about
the Holy Grail?
"Nothing," Vernon snorted. "Absolutely nothing." He crossed his arms. Gresnick raised his eyebrows. "That's not right, though, is it?
Vernon dug his fingers into his arms. He got his fill of hearing about the Grail. For three years, his ex-girlfriend talked about something else.
Girlfriend? Holy. How else could you describe the person who haunted you day and night? The last
thing he wanted was to be dragged back into that freak show.

"Mr. Vernon," Commander Harrington said, 'the reason I brought you here is that one of the prisoners had some information in his possession.

Vernon if the cold crescent room.
'It appears the inmates were planning to kidnap or murder someone,' Harrington continued.

Vernon jerked his hand forward, almost spilling his coffee. 'TO THE Prime
Minister? ", he ventured. 'The Queen?
“It's actually your ex-girlfriend. We have no idea why, especially given her condition.”

Vernon's hands shook and he pushed them against his thighs to steady them. This is impossible. He stared at Harrington. 'Lucy? "The name, as it came, scraped his mouth like sandpaper. 'Condition?

Harrington looked away. "I'm sorry James, I thought you knew."

7

ime of your medication. One blue and one red. Take a sip of water. 'The nurse leaned over and placed the tray with her pills, glass of water and half an orange on the table next to the patient.

Lucy Galahan let the nurse watch her take her pills, then leaned back in the rocking chair, pulling the blue blanket up to her neck. It wasn't long before she felt the usual drowsiness creeping over her: the monotonous march of dulled senses, of everything fading into the distance. Occasionally, she resented how her life took the time pill away from her, but usually she simply felt less bad. That was all she wanted, for the pain to stop.

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Sometimes she fantasized about collecting all her pain together, every jagged fragment she had collected in her life, and molding it into some shapeless doll. She puts him next to a radiator and watches him melt, taking all her hurt with him.

As she fell asleep, Lucy remembered that when she was a child the thing she looked forward to most was when her mother put her to bed, kissed her goodnight and said, "Sleep well, don't let the bedbugs bite. Nothing had hurt in those days, neither Even the bedbugs. Every time Mom turned off the light, she felt warm and safe. There were never any bad dreams. Now, that's all there was.
When she opened her eyes again, she was in her bed and two nuns and a nurse were looking at her. The only light in the room came from a pair of candles, the flickering light drawn to the silver crucifixes hanging from the nuns' necks.

"Leave us," said a voice - a man's voice.
Lucy was scared. It was last month since she found a man. For six hundred years the convent of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was strictly for women only.
"Are you right, Your Excellency?" One of the nuns said. “Mother Superior doesn’t…”
"There is no error," said the voice. 'She's the only one. "
Lucy didn't understand. Excellence? Who was this person? She tried to prop herself up on her elbows to see him, but she was exhausted and her head fell back onto the pillow.
The nuns and nurse closed the door behind them as they left. They had left a candle on Lucy's dressing table. She could hear the sound of breathing - her own and the man's. Where he was? The foot of her bed, she decided. She didn't leave him much space. It was a narrow hospital

bed with broken springs. Not much else could be fitted into the room. In the days when this was an ordinary convent, it would have been called a cell rather than a room.

"Let me apologize for bothering you like this," the man said. Lucy thought she detected traces of an Irish or Scottish accent.
'I know this must be uncomfortable for you,' the man continued.
'Who are you?' Lucy's eyes followed the direction of the candle flame up to the ceiling. The candlelight danced over the paintings she had pinned there, so that when she woke up each morning they would be the first things she saw. She realized that the man was as intended in his paintings as she was. They covered most surfaces in his cell. It even doubled in some places. It would be a lie to describe her as a skilled painter, but it was the only activity that relaxed her. She transmitted her pain through the brush and onto the canvas. He comforted her to see the pain become something separate from her, at a distance, somewhere not present in her heart.

Maybe the signs were always there. When she was a teenager, she engaged in mild self-harm - some superficial cuts to her legs and arms with razor blades.
She read Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar, fascinated by expressions like 'Breathe the sour air.'
The man's voice interrupted his thoughts. "So it's true," he said. "I didn't dare believe it.

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"You still haven't said who you are." Lucy wasn't sure she was having this conversation. Dr Levis, her psychiatrist, said she had been delusional on some occasions.
The illusions were just part of it. Severe trauma can lead to
dissociative identity disorder, Levis said. The new name for old-fashioned Multiple Personality Syndrome.
Voices in the head, several of them. But that was in the past, wasn't it? Getting better
now, Levis, he said, much better.
"I'm from the Vatican," the man said. 'My name is Cardinal Joseph Sinclair. I am
the prefect of the Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei."
Lucy concentrated hard. Was this a new voice in your head, or the real voice of a real person? All the time, she had to look for clues to separate the real from the imaginary. In the ancient world, she
wouldn't have had a problem. 'Reality' was much more fluid then. People knew
there was an afterlife because they had seen it. Dreams - How Wonderful They Must Have It seemed to
those who had no idea what they were in for. Another world, where the dead were alive again.
The ancients believed that the world of dreams was the real world, that when we went to sleep
we were offered glimpses of the world we would inhabit when our sleep became permanent. When her
parents died, Lucy lost the ability to know where the dream ended and reality began.

'Sorry, I should have told the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,' said the cardinal. 'It is my job to protect the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church from those who seek to
subvert them.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith? A fragment of Lucy's old life came back to her.
At Oxford University she was an expert on non-standard belief systems and she was well aware of what the unorthodox - heretics - feared most.
'Why don't you say who you really are? "She felt that she was speaking to the past, to all the normal things she had lost. Perhaps she had evoked this urban man as a replacement for her father. She longed to be hugged by her father again. It seemed impossible that he would ever hold her more, never ask how she was
feeling, never ask rude questions about her love life, or how her career was going.

"So, you've heard of us," the man said. There was something different in his voice. The sudden hardness.

Lucy felt a shiver run through her. 'When will you stop calling yourselves the Inquisition? " she asked.

8

Ernon couldn't concentrate. In a world that may be dying, his personal ghost had resurfaced. Lucy Galahan was the love of his life, the one who for three years dealt with every bizarre theory
about the great saint's relics - real and legendary - that messed up human history.
A professor of Comparative Mythology and Esoteric Studies at the University of Oxford, she was dazzlingly intelligent. It helped that she had great looks too, and an athletic body honed by her obsession with diving.
Put it all together and she was Vernon's ideal woman...until she abandoned him.

"This is a file found in the possession of one of the inmates," Gresnick said, sliding a

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folder for Vernon. "It's a surveillance log. It's all there: a detailed diary of Lucy Galahan's movements over the past week, her daily schedule, who her caregivers are, long-lens photographs, background reports, and so on.
Vernon, shifting uncomfortably in his chair, looked at one of the images: a close-up of Lucy in a wheelchair in a garden, accompanied by a nun. It shocked him to see the face he had tormented for so long. Even worse was seeing Lucy so defenseless. Many times, he tried to pretend that she meant nothing to him, but that only made things worse. His black hair tangled his thoughts. He spent a lot of time running his fingers through it, playing with it and smelling it. Her eyes did the most damage, however. They were big and soft, almost childlike. The shade of blue was remarkable, almost violet.
Swallowing hard, Vernon stirred through the rest of the material. The file stated that Lucy was in a nursing home on the outskirts of Glastonbury for the recovery of Catholics who had suffered mental breakdowns. Home care? Judging by the photos, it was a creepy old convent. Our Lady of

Perpetual Help was called. You'd know you were in trouble if you ever ended up in a place with a similar name.
With Glastonbury being one of the most famous locations in southwest England, often linked to mystical forces, Vernon wondered if Lucy was the real reason the Delta Force deserters were in that part of the country, or if Glastonbury itself was the key. It seemed like a bizarre proposition that the soldiers would have any interest in Lucy, especially given her mental state.
It had been eighteen months since they separated. When her mother died of breast cancer, Lucy hadn't coped. He threw himself into his work. The more he tried to comfort her, the more she pushed him away. Finally, she sent him a letter saying she didn't want to see him again. No reasons given. It was the coldest thing I had ever read, and inconceivable that Lucy had written. She didn't answer his phone calls and didn't respond to any of his emails and letters.
On the rebound, Vernon met the Swedish nurse who became his wife, and he tried to put Lucy out of his mind for good. Deep down, he never stopped thinking about her. It was a struggle to pretend that his wife was the great love of his life when she could never hope to displace Lucy.
Anna was blonde and no less cerebral, the opposite of Lucy. That's why he chose her, of course. He couldn't blame her for returning to Sweden. Their relationship began to take off from the moment she announced she was pregnant, weeks after they started seeing each other. He did the honorable thing and married her, but now he wondered where the honor was in making two people miserable. What would be the effect on baby Louise? Not healthy, that was for sure. She was a beautiful little thing and he loved every moment I spent with her, but she was better off with her mother.

Out of sight out of mind, he thought. But that wasn't the case with Lucy.
Hadn't he already sunk Lucy into a madhouse?
Gresnick handed over another folder. 'The DIA have produced a detailed file on Lucy,' he said. 'We are trying to find some reason Delta Force defectors would target her. During our research, your name came up, which is why I asked to see you. So far, the best I have been able to do

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arrive at is related to the fact that the two defectors we caught last night were studying ancient manuscripts about the Holy Grail.
Vernon nodded. A couple of years ago, Lucy published The Unholy
Grail: The Secret Heresy, a controversial analysis of the Grail legend, claiming it was a coded reference to heretical rituals. Initiates would understand what the Grail story was really saying, she argued, while the uninitiated would think it was simply an exciting tale. Because the story was dressed up to make it superficially consistent with orthodox Christianity, the Catholic Church never banned it, although they were always uncomfortable with it. Thus, the legend of the Grail allowed heretical beliefs to be distributed safely throughout Europe.
A book published in 1920 inspired many of Lucy's ideas. From Ritual to Romance by Jessie Weston was, in its time, highly influential and much more

ridiculed. Lucy's book suffered the derision part of the equation, but unlike Weston who had enjoyed admirers of the caliber of T. S. Eliot, Lucy had no sympathizers.

“I know it's a very big responsibility,” Gresnick said, “but I'm afraid there's more. I think we should let him see the two prisoners now.
Vernon stood up, waiting to leave the room.
'Oh, we're not going anywhere,' Gresnick said. 'I want to show you the video we took when the prisoners were brought in.'
'Why can't I see them in the flesh?
"Just watch the video. Gresnick turned to the large LCD TV to the side of the room, currently showing a screensaver of mathematical symbols. He pressed a button on a remote control and the screensaver disappeared, replaced by video footage of soldiers They had, at gunpoint, two handcuffed men in dark suits.
One of the prisoners looked at the camera.
Almighty God. Vernon swerved in revulsion.
Gresnick froze the image. "How old would you say the man is?" Seventy? Eighty?
Vernon was perplexed by how an old man could be serving in Delta
Force, and even more perplexed by how an elderly man trapped in a library ended up in such a horrible state. Surely he must have been taken directly to the hospital. Much of its flesh was charred; Third degree burns from the looks of him. Strips were peeling.

"He's thirty-one," Gresnick replied. "A doctor said she was exposed to incredible levels of radiation."
"Thirty-one? Impossible."
Gresnick press the play button again.
The soldiers took the prisoners to the detention block and placed them in separate cells. Dr. Hugh Wells, a friend of Vernon, placed the burned man on a prison bed and attended to his injuries. Another doctor began cutting off the prisoner's clothes.

Gresnick quickly advanced the footage until it showed Dr. Wells alone in one of the interview rooms, speaking softly with a camera overhead.
"The man's body is covered from head to toe with blisters and sores,"
Wells said. The doctor then mentioned that, as a young intern, he was part of an international team of doctors sent to the Soviet Union to treat victims.

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of
the Chernobyl disaster. This prisoner's condition, Wells said, reminded him of the nuclear engineers who had been closest to the site of the partial meltdown.
Many died in agony within days. This man, according to Wells, was much worse and unlikely to survive hours a day never mind. All they were trying to do was ease your pain.

As for the second prisoner, Wells said that although he appeared healthy, he was being kept in isolation as a precautionary measure. No one would be allowed to approach the prisoner directly without protective clothing. Any interrogation of prisoners would have to take place remotely.

Gresnick stopped the video and the screensaver reappeared.
"I just don't understand it." Vernon shook his head. "I mean, what happened to this man? The radiation source? Where? How?
'We have no idea. Gresnick reached out and lifted the emerald paperweight. "Something very strange happened when the armed police arrested the two men. They were told to put their hands up and stay where they were. Instead, one of the men reached into his pocket and took it out. The police thought he was reaching for a gun and opened fire. The bullet hit this ball. It didn't leave a mark. "It's just a paperweight," Vernon blurted.

Gresnick shrugged. 'Well, the prisoner seemed to think he was valuable. The police had to value it away from him. There is another curious thing - before touching this object, the prisoner was not injured, and looked like a normal, thirty-one year old. The burns and rapid aging appeared while he was being brought here, but he was not exposed to any radiation. The ball was apparently the last thing he touched.

'What are you saying? That radiation came from that ball? '
Gresnick tapped the back of the globe with a pencil. "As far as I can make out, it's just a ball of colored glass. Several of us have played it without mishap, but we're sending it to a lab to have it analyzed in depth."

Vernon imagined he was looking at the pieces of a giant puzzle, but he could form no idea what the big picture might be.
'The man burned is Captain Lucius Ferris,' Gresnick said. 'His colleague is Sergeant Samuel Morson. They are both decorated veterans. These were the Special Forces men chosen for the most dangerous operations. In terms of our elite soldiers, who were the cream of the cream.

Vernon couldn't think of a single plausible idea why America's biggest soldiers would go AWOL.

'It's time to see if these guys want to talk. "Gresnick picked up the remote control and pressed a button.
On the LCD TV, a live feed appeared from the prisoners in their adjacent cells.
The cell walls were made of reinforced glass to allow unobstructed 24/7 observation. It was possible to see the two men from a camera. Sergeant Morson had been made to sit in a position giving him a clear view of his superior in the adjacent cell, a tactic, Vernon assumed, designed to make the sergeant anxious and more talkative, but Morson was showing no signs

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of distress. His expression arrogance mixed with satisfaction. Valter was perplexed. Why does Morson seem so pleased with himself when his captain is likely to die at any moment?

Gresnick pulled the microphone toward him and coughed a couple of times.
Vernon noticed how neatly Gresnick's cufflinks were arranged, how straight and immaculate his tie was. He was obviously the type to spend a lot of time getting everything just so.

"What is this object, Sergeant Morson?" Gresnick held up the emerald globe, pointing at the camera above.

Morson looked at the monitor that had been set up in his cell to allow for easy, two-way communication.
'Isn't it a paperweight?
"So, you wouldn't mind if I smashed him into the ground? 'Do whatever you want.'
If Gresnick believed the object held some great significance to Morson and his colleague, they had received no encouragement. 'Why did you and your men carry out seven raids? ' he asked. 'What do you want with religious relics?
Morson did not respond.
'Why were you examining microfilm of ancient manuscripts in the British Library?

This time, Morson smiled, but still didn't speak.
"Why do natural disasters begin immediately after your seven raids?
"You have no idea, do you? The kingdom of the blind, and not a one-eyed man in sight," said Morson without warning.
'What do you want with this woman?' Gresnick raised an image of Lucy.
'He knows. Morson pointed to Vernon.
Vernon shrugged. He had to read the DIA file to find out what had happened to Lucy since her break-up. After his mother died, his father committed suicide months later. At the same time, Lucy's professional reputation was ruined when her theories about the Grail were derided as speculative, non-academic nonsense. "This poor woman is clearly losing her mind," one of her critics said, before literally being proven right. The whole world was going crazy, Vernon thought, but Lucy got there before everyone else.

"You've been to a lot of trouble," he told Gresnick Morson. "She must be very special."

Morson smiled.

"Why her? She can't help you, or be a threat to you. She has been diagnosed as suffering from acute post-traumatic stress disorder, leading to Dissociative Identity Disorder. If she was going to harm anyone, it would be herself." same.

"You don't know anything," Morson snapped. “That woman…” “Yes?”
'She is the most important person in the world.'

9

Ardinal Sinclair was tall, probably in his early fifties, with graying hair, a weather-beaten face, and gray eyes.

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"I'm not here to harm you," he said. "Our enemies have always exaggerated our reputation for torture."

Lucy, sitting up in bed, was struck by the cardinal's physical resemblance to her father. Maybe her brain was tricking her again, projecting her own desires. In her black pajamas, she was a good match for the cardinal.
Dressed in black, with a white dog collar, like an ordinary priest, Sinclair wore nothing to suggest that he was the second most powerful man in the Catholic Church, the Vatican's doctrinal enforcer, its final authority on heresy.
Taking the candle from the dressing table, he held it up to examine Lucy's Paintings.
She watched him closely. For the last few minutes, she had been silent, trying to absorb the news. No TVs, radios, newspapers and computers were allowed to patients in the convent and none of the nurses and nuns had chosen to pass word of the outside world. From what the cardinal said, hell had materialized outside in the last few days. Her own life was a wasteland, and now it seemed like the rest of the world was joining her. Sinclair said seven so-called supervolcanoes were on the verge of eruption. America, with three, including one in Yellowstone National Park, was particularly vulnerable. If, as now seemed likely, they all hatched in the next day or two, civilization, if not all life on earth, would disappear.

'Why did you come here?' Lucy asked. 'I mean, at a time like this you have to have so many more important things to do. '
The cardinal did not take his eyes off the walls of his room. "These paintings," he said. "What I didn't tell you is that I've seen one of them before."
Lucy looked at him. He had never been to the convent before, so how could he have seen one of its paintings? Was he playing a game? She glanced toward her medicine cabinet. You have to calm down. She reached for the cabinet where she kept her tranquilizers, but the man grabbed her hand and held it firmly.
'You're not delusional, Lucy. I read your most recent medical report. He says you are getting much better. They were about to put it on launch day in the community. Dr Levis is delighted with your progress.
Getting better and better? Lucy wanted so badly to be okay again, but every time she imagined it, it ended with her falling.
"How can you say that you have seen my paintings? That is impossible."
"I almost didn't believe it myself until now."
Lucy was startled when the cardinal sat down next to her. Her father used to sit next to her in this exact same way. It's not dead. Still here, still able to comfort her. She would give anything for that to be true.
The cardinal pointed to the painting in the middle of the wall behind Lucy's headboard. It was the first one she ever worked on, the model for the others.

"I don't know how," said Sinclair, "but that painting there is also in Rome. It is part of a huge mural found in a secret vault in the tomb of Pope Julius II. The artist who painted it died the day after his death." conclusion. The mural was his final, greatest masterpiece."
Lucy closed her eyes. A name jumped into his mind. It was as if a thousand closed doors were opening in his mind and light was breaking through, banishing the darkness that had left him.

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took care of her for so long. All kinds of strange facts were pouring into her, things she couldn't know. She started to shake. My God, what is happening to me? "Raphael," she said, hesitantly, hoping Sinclair would tell her she was wrong. The expression on his face showed that there was no mistake.

"Only three people alive have seen Rafael's mural," Sinclair said slowly.
'Raphael died almost 500 years ago.' Lucy was mystified. Ideas were flashing through her mind, things she didn't have time to process, almost overwhelming her.

'Raphael died in 1520 at just 37 years of age,' Sinclair replied. 'He painted his picture 500 years before you.

Lucy squeezed her knees, shaking her head from side to side.
"Come with me." Sinclair stood up and walked towards the door. "You can see for yourself."

10

Ernon looked at the TV screen, searching Sergeant Morson's face for clues.
How could Lucy be so important? While Harrington had a whispered conversation with Gresnick, he again leafed through his DIA file. He said he spent most of his time working on a series of depressive paintings, covering every inch of his room with them. Each screen had a blue background and featured a female figure, with long black hair, wearing a black wedding dress. The woman's face was always blank, just a white, featureless oval.

A psychiatrist's report said Lucy was terrified of being 'in the black' - Lucy's own description of her condition, apparently. Vernon didn't need translation. Lucy and her father were keen divers and had taken them with them on several expeditions. 'In the blue' was a diving term for the place of a deep dive into crystal clear waters, where the diver could see neither the sea surface nor the sea floor: all he had around him was the color blue in all directions. Many divers found an inspiring, fun place, but for some it was disorienting and filled with panic. Vernon was one of the last. I once heard a diver who had suffered a mental breakdown describe the experience as being "in the blue" The diver had subtly changed the meaning of a specific point in a dive where it becomes difficult to tell yourself from below, back, from front, to the perfected etiquette for acute depression - the loss of bearings. a person, their identity. Lucy was now using it in that context, too, it seemed.

Vernon had been in the blue only once - on a summer swim in the surprisingly clear water off the Cornish coast near Penzance - and never wanted to be there again. Lucy and her father accompanied him at first, but were eager to explore an old shipwreck. He stupidly said he'd like to be on his own for a while, and they swam away. After a few minutes, he couldn't see anything except blue. He was in a blue world that stretched in all directions, a place where he had no anchors, no bearings, no pointers.
He just got lost. He began to think that he might actually have drowned and was now in

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some blue hell, but Lucy swam below and dragged him back to the surface.
'What's going on with your captain? " Vernon Gresnick's voice pushed him back to the present. "What caused these injuries? You must know that he will be killed within hours. "

"The captain is not dying. Morson smiled. "He is being reborn. 'What?'
"You'll see in the morning.
"Some people are saying the world is about to end. What's your opinion, Sergeant?"

"Something amazing is coming. The very earth will tremble beneath your feet."
"Are you referring to the Turkish earthquakes?
Morson continued to smile. “He knows we're coming for him. He left us before, but this time there's nothing he can do.”
'What are you talking?' Commander Harrington spoke for the first time during the interrogation. "Who is he?" 'Are
you a religious man? Morson asked.
Harrington nodded.
"Then you know exactly what I mean.
Vernon leaned forward, curious to see Harrington's reaction. His boss never hid the fact that he was a fully paid God squadder - a Methodist, Baptist or Quaker; Vernon couldn't remember which. He wasn't interested enough to find out the difference between the three, and always got them mixed up.
Harrington, to Vernon's annoyance, kept a Bible prominently displayed on the desk in his office. Vernon felt it was inappropriate for the religion to make such a brazen appearance in MI5's HQ.

Harrington's expression changed little. He looked at the wall calendar showing Ferrari supercars.
"There are significant days coming, Mr.
Vernon? " he asked. 'Birthdays, religious festivals, that sort of thing? "
Vernon knew what to do. Spectacular acts of terror, protest, revolt, and rebellion were often scheduled for memorable dates, as if they could draw legitimacy, power, perhaps, from previous incidents. Swinging round on a computer

On one side of the table, he used the internet to research impending big dates. The first of them was until April 30th, the eve of May Day.
"The Germans call April 30th Walpurgis Nacht. Vernon read the first entry that appeared on the screen. "It is supposedly the night when witches emerge into the open to
avenge the God-fearing people. 'He quickly scanned the second entry. 'It's also an ancient Celtic festival called Beltane, involving a sacrificial fire.' He noticed a third possibility, unrelated to the supernatural but just as chilling. 'And it's the day Hitler committed suicide.' .

Gresnick straightened up when he heard this. 'What do you think of Hitler, Sergeant? "
"He knew.
"Know what?
"The dead always outnumber the living. They call the living monsters. They will
call us monsters too, perhaps the worst monsters of them all."

"This is getting us nowhere." Harrington sever the link to Morson.
The math screensaver reappeared on the TV monitor. Ancient Greek letters, large and

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Small, in each color, flooded the LCD screen,
rotating, reversing, shrinking and expanding. An unsolvable equation, Vernon thought,
just like this whole situation. Distracted, he took a moment to register
that Dr. Wells had entered the room.
"I thought you should be told at once," Wells told Harrington. “The tests we've done on
Captain Ferris don't make any sense. We haven't made any
progress in identifying what kind of radiation he's exposed to, but it appears to be
causing a metabolic transformation.” He rubbed his face nervously. "I
mean, it's changing on a molecular level." "I'm not following."

"Commander, I've never seen anything like it. The things
that are happening to this man - nothing in medical science can explain it."
'What are you saying?' Harrington stood up from his chair and came face to face with Wells.

‘Do you believe in God?’ Wells asked.
'I'm sure my religious beliefs are completely irrelevant. Get to the point, doctor.

'Prisoner's burning are not getting any worse. In fact, they are the cure.
He is becoming younger and younger. Wells wiped his forehead with a tissue.
"All the burnt flesh has peeled off. The skin underneath is - how shall I say - translucent. You can practically see through it. But there's something else. Symmetrical growths have appeared on each of your shoulders, almost like - Jesus, I know how that feels. It should sound 'He spoke the next words very slowly.. "...Budding wings." He shook his head. “I know it's impossible, but...Christ, this can't be happening.”

'Get a grip on yourself ", Harrington latiu.

"I'm not a believer. If I were - no, he's insane."
Harrington crossed his arms and turned away from the doctor.
Wells looked at the floor. "Commander, I think the prisoner is turning into
··· 'The break was painfully long. "... An angel."

11

t was some kind of trick. There was no other explanation. Lucy wanted to get up from
her seat and run. When Cardinal Sinclair took her to the
chapel, turned on the slide projector and inserted the slide he had brought with him from
Rome, she expected to see a conventional
Renaissance painting, but what was in front of her was a miracle: it it simply couldn't be.
When she looked at the huge image projected on the back wall, she trembled.
"In 500 years, only a handful of people have seen this," Sinclair said. "No one can enter
the vault where it is kept without the Pope's
express permission. Raphael worked so hard on it that it killed him. It was tension and
exhaustion that led to his death in just thirty-seven years.
Lucy made a fist and pressed her fingers against her forehead. She
got up and left, almost staggering, backwards, trying to absorb everything in the mural.
Twenty-four small panels were arranged around a large central panel, which was divided

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In the middle, the upper part shows a traditional celestial scene of angels bathed in divine light, the lower an image of the end of the world, focusing on the frightened faces of masses of ordinary people as they fled from the fire raining down on them from of a sky burning black.

Of the surrounding panels, one showed Solomon's Temple, another the Ark of the Covenant. There was a photo of the moment a Roman centurion pierced
Jesus' side with a spear, and another showing the beheading of John the Baptist. The Tree of Knowledge and the Garden of Eden were presented, and Cain killing Abel. One showed Jesus drinking from a cup at the Last Supper.

Lucy's eyes darted from panel to panel. There were several other conventional religious scenes, but then things got weird. One panel showed King Arthur in Camelot, another the procession of the Grail Hallows in front of the former Fisher King in the hall of Grail Castle, another King Arthur's final apocalyptic battle in Camlann. There were a few other images of King Arthur, and then several panels with scenes whose meaning was entirely lost on Lucy.

Arthurian art, she knew, never seriously took off until the Pre-Raphaelites became obsessed with it in the 19th century. No art historian had ever suggested that Raphael painted scenes of King Arthur. If these images were authentic, they could revolutionize art history, perhaps history itself.

But it wasn't the panels that kept drawing Lucy's gaze back to the mural.
They were unlikely, but not impossible. The mural also contained

a feature for which no explanation was conceivable. That was the panel in the center of the bottom line, a panel that had absolutely nothing in common with Raphael's sublime style.

Lucy asked herself to wake up. This simply can't be real. What was in front of her was not just familiar, it was her own work. The panel was an exact copy of the first painting she made in her cell.

"I know it's hard to accept," Sinclair said, "but it's there."
Lucy, standing in her pajamas and black slippers, rubbed her arms. The chapel was so cold. She continued rubbing, the movement becoming more and more frantic. Maybe she could scrub what she was seeing, erase it from her mind.
'If you study the panels,' Sinclair commented, 'you will see that they form a narrative of how you move clockwise. Pope Julius II died seven years before Raphael. We have no idea whether he left Raphael with specific instructions to create these images, or whether he allowed Raphael to use his artistic imagination.

Raphael left no explanation as to what the images meant.
"The Vatican showed the mural to trusted experts, and it could not explain all of the images. Many are unlike any Julius was known to favor. Only one person offered any clues as to what was happening.
Lucy took a seat on one of the benches. With a jolt, she sat up. One second there was nothing in her head, the next name jumped out at her, just as it had before with Raphael, as if she had
been waiting for years. He was so bright, so vivid, he might as well have been lit in neon.
'Nostradamus,' she said. Why was she so sure? It didn't make sense. She tilted her head.

The cardinal sat down next to her, giving her a nod of confirmation.

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'What's happening to me?' Lucy closed her eyes. Words were bubbling in her mind, things she didn't understand. 'Decision...' she said, '...Decision Point.
Salvation. Damnation. Choice. Destroyer or Redeemer.
Sinclair looked at her. 'Why are you saying these things, Lucy? "I have no idea.
'Are you afraid? "
'I don't understand any of this. What's going on?'
'It's all there, in your subconscious, Lucy. You know what you have to

to do.

"I do not know anything."
'Lucy, the Vatican never revealed that it once consulted Nostradamus

in relation to this mural. They warned him under pain of death not to divulge a word. The things he wrote down were locked away. Only Popes and holders of my office have ever been granted access to his writings. However, without warning, you mentioned your name. Every word you said to me was used by Nostradamus.

Lucy cradled her head.
'Nostradamus said that the Decision Point was when the world would be saved or destroyed by a Chosen One.

Lucy stood up then walked towards the wall where the mural is being projected. She reached for the panel that somehow belonged to her. The projection played over the back of her hand, rippling and twisting as she moved her hand across it. "Either I reproduced a work unknown to Raphael," she said, "or he reproduced a painting unknown to me, 500 years before I was born.

'The Pope died a few hours ago,' Sinclair replied. 'I have to be with the other cardinals in the Sistine Chapel to elect the new Pope. Now you can understand why I came here in your place. "

The dead Pope? Lucy took her hand back to her side and turned towards the altar. She had already gone to see the Pope back when she was still a good Catholic, when she still believed in all the things that now seemed so ridiculous to her. She was in St. Peter's Square, with tens of thousands of faithful, awaiting the papal blessing on Easter Sunday. Now he's gone, just like his parents. They all did, sooner or later.

She looked again at the faceless woman floating in the blue. Why would Raphael deface his stunning work of art with that innocent piece of work? It couldn't have meant anything to him. It had a meaning purely for her. On the days she went diving, the part of the dive she most looked forward to was being in the blue. She used to stay there, in that strange watery limbo, that blue world, feeling light, free from the pressures of life. Nothing could touch her. No one could
demand anything from her. It was as if he had found the perfect place to hide.

"I don't know who this faceless woman is," she said in a low voice. 'The figure in search of an identity, that's all. It's no one in particular. "

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'But it couldn't be more obvious,' Sinclair replied. 'It's you.'
Lucy couldn't blame him for thinking that. He needed it to be her. After coming so far, there was no room for error.
'Nostradamus said Raphael's mural was a prophecy about the end of the world,' said Sinclair. 'The individual photos are a code. If resolved, the world will be saved. If not, it's all over.

'I can't help it, said Lucy. "Look at me: I'm in an asylum.
Without warning, a strange noise interrupted and they fell silent.
Lucy was the first to speak. "Fireworks?"
The sounds were distant, but clear enough. Staccato bursts, loud bangs.
But why would anyone be celebrating at a time like this?
Sinclair stood up, then ran to the door, locking it shut.
'What are you doing?' Lucy felt growing panic for her. "Those sounds," Sinclair said. "It's gunshots.

12

Was Ernon struggling to take her inside an angel? Of all his colleagues, Hugh Wells was the most rational, but now he watched in amazement as the doctor's hands shook.

"There must be another explanation. Wells collapsed into a chair, holding his head.
Vernon looked around the room and, for a moment, imagined that the walls were approaching from all sides.
Commander Harrington shook his head. Wearing his pinstripe suit like a City financier, he looked like Vernon for being in the wrong place and the wrong job. Colonel Gresnick was the only one maintaining any calm. Wasn't he shaken by the thought that he might be an angel in the next cell?

'What do you think, Colonel? "Vernon asked.
'I haven't filled it in at all I know about Section 5. Gresnick rolled the pen back and forth between his fingers. "Originally, it had twenty members. In 1945, they had been together for two years and had not suffered an individual casualty. Within a month of beginning interrogations of the Nazi officers, nine were dead.
"

'But wasn't the war practically over?'
Gresnick nodded. He explained that, shortly before the ninth man's death, this same man made a stunning accusation to General Patton. He claimed eight of his colleagues were murdered, and his most incredible claim concerns the identity of the killers: the other members of Section 5.

The next day, he was discovered hanging in his room. The official verdict was suicide. An investigation found that he had been pressured for some time.
Unfiled interrogation notes discovered among his possessions related to the crazy story involving a conspiracy going back 10,000 years, of which the Nazis were supposedly the current heirs. The other interrogators denied that any questioning ever occurred and said the allegations were absurd. The victim's notes were taken as solid evidence that he had lost his mind. There was no reason to question the conclusions of the inquiry.

'But things are different now, right?' Vernon interrupted.

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"It's my job to rule out nothing. All we can do is go by the facts. Something inexplicable is happening to Captain Ferris. Of that, there is no doubt. Everything else is speculation."

“That's right,” said Harrington, “pure speculation. " He turned to Dr. Wells. "Doctor, I want you to continue to monitor Ferris' condition and let us know immediately if there
are any significant changes. In the meantime, I will post more guards. And Colonel Gresnick, I want to know exactly what Task Section 5 was in 1945. What were
they trying to find out? "
'Section 5 reported directly to General Patton,' Gresnick said. 'Patton was obsessed with knowing what Hitler did with the Spear of Destiny.

"Are we talking about General Patton? Vernon said. "The man himself.
"Why should a brilliant soldier like Patton care about an old spear?" Even as he asked the question, Vernon felt sweat running down his back. He already knew something
about the Spear of Destiny. It's featured in Lucy's book, but in a peculiar way. It was his belief that he, not crucifixion, killed Jesus Christ.
"Mr. Vernon, Patton was not a conventional general. He believed he was the reincarnation of Hannibal. Furthermore, he had very unorthodox ideas about the post-war situation in Europe. 'What do you mean?'
'He wanted to re-arm two Waffen SS divisions, incorporate them into his
army and attack the Soviet Union. He believed that communism was the greatest threat imaginable."
'Was he a Nazi sympathizer?
"Many people thought so. He died from injuries sustained in a car accident in Germany in late 1945. On an empty road in foggy conditions, his car and driver collided with a US military truck coming in the opposite direction. By For no apparent reason, he swerved right
into the path of his car. Some people don't think it was an accident."

"What about the Spear of Destiny?" One time, Vernon questions
Lucy like this. He remembered how excited she was when she found a new test to fit her head. She was so full of life and energy. It was horrible to think of her now as a lunatic being
pushed in a wheelchair.
'Patton supposedly wanted to take it to America,' Gresnick said. 'He declared that if the Americans possessed it they would rule the world. '
"So why did he give it back to the Austrians?
"He didn't. Rumor has it that Patton organized a convincing retort to be made.
This was the one sent to Vienna.
"In that case, what happened to the real?
"From what we can make out, he was sent back to America and hidden in a safe location in North Carolina. Gresnick put down his pen. 'Fort Bragg, to be exact.'

Vernon turned to Harrington, expecting his boss to be so startled by the revelation that he was. Instead, Harrington's face had paled.
"Is something wrong, sir?
"I never thought I'd see the day," Harrington said slowly. "I thought it was pure madness. It can't be true."
"I don't understand, sir.

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"Don't you see? All of this, it's all connected. Somehow, Hitler is coming from the grave."

"I beg you pardon?"

“Mr. Vernon, I want you to go to the file section immediately.” Harrington took out a tissue and wiped his glasses. “I need you to bring back one of the black files, along with its official translation. When you get there, ask the archivist to call me for the authorization code.

'Which black file?' Vernon asked.
It was Gresnick who responded. 'The Cainite Destiny.

13

he shooting had stopped. Cardinal Sinclair stood at the chapel's main door, listening to the sounds in the hallway outside.

Lucy sat in the church pews, in front of the altar. She quickly glanced at the cardinal to see what he was doing, but now she only focused on her knees, wishing she could curl up into a little ball. She was the only one in the asylum, wearing only pajamas and slippers, but there were people in the hallways with guns and grenades, who were much crazier than she could ever be.
According to Sinclair, a platoon of soldiers had arrived for her. He told others to know how important she was. Significant? She couldn't imagine anyone being less important. If she took the medication, would everything go away? Maybe she had taken the wrong pills that morning. Once she took many and pumped her stomach. Sometimes she pretended it was just an accident. More generally, she painted new pictures, bluer than ever, trying to find the tone that captured her feelings that day, but she never came close.
What color is suicide?
'What the soldiers? " she asked.
"If I know about you, Lucy, then so do the others." "Everything was secret. You said so."

"What we know, the other side also knows. This has always been the way.
God must test us. What would be the point otherwise? 'Sinclair looked at the door again. 'I have to get him out of here.
"The other side?" Lucy repeated. 'What are you talking? "She knew this was a good time to move, but she stayed where she was. "I'm not going anywhere." She hadn't left the convent for six months. The idea of being out there. It was bad enough before, but now it was unthinkable.
"Good and evil," said Sinclair. "The other side is always just a step back."
When the cardinal grabbed her arms, Lucy screamed. "I didn't ask for any of this.
Get away from me."
There was a flash of emotion in the cardinal's eyes: hatred. Startled, Lucy tried to stand, but Sinclair held her back.
"Almighty God." Lucy backed away. 'You hate me.
"Come on, now, Lucy, you're scared. You don't know what you're saying."

'Fuck!' Lucy's mouth dropped open. She couldn't believe what she had just said.

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During her time at the convent, no one had sworn, not even once. Swearing in a chapel... what kind of punishment was reserved for that? The words reverberated. They looked strange, as if the convent had heard of them, failed to understand them, and was now spitting them out. So obscene, so nasty. Lucy was ashamed.
The cardinal, clearly shocked, let go, took a few steps, then knelt before the altar. He started to pray. For a second, Lucy thought she had never seen anything so absurd. Then, she felt stupid. How
can you accuse a cardinal of being ridiculous for praying?

Filming began again, this time much closer. Sinclair prayed louder, in Latin. The words were seductive, somehow much more potent than English. They were imbued with holiness, with magic. Once, Lucy prayed like that too. She prayed until her knees were red and raw, until her hands were almost bleeding. He wanted God to cure his mother's cancer. Within days, the mother was dead.

He's not there, she said to herself, looking at the figure of Christ. He never was. It was so obvious to her now. Of course, she had a Creator. In fact, she had two, but they were both dead. First his mother, ravaged by the tumors that spread everywhere inside her, then his father, ravaged so
lethally by despair. He left a suicide note. In blue everything was written down the page

in

written more and more desperately, until the last three words: Forgive me, Lucy.
What do you do when your creators are dead? They gave him life, but they could not save their own. And they certainly can't save yours. They had abandoned it. Nothing made sense any longer.
First, you are created - and the thing about that is that no created thing ever asks to be created - then you are stuck with it. You are forced to exist whether you like it or not. The last thing you are offered
is a choice. And you soon learn there is only one way out: death. The creators made you know how the story should end. And creation is supposed to be good?

She closed her eyes. All I could think of was an old lullaby.
London Bridge is falling. Over and over again, she said the words. They comfort her in some way. Falling, falling.

hat do you mean? 'The veins on Commander Harrington's forehead were swelling. 'He can't be gone.
"
Vernon explained again, and was surprised to relate the facts so calmly. He had not been calm a little earlier when he entered the archive section, normally the best ordered part of Thames
House, and discovered the archivist dead, his face bruised with terror, and the archive room looking as if it had been bombed. Top-secret documents, many of which

of them charred, it was scattered everywhere. All the cupboards were broken open, bookshelves pushed over, as if some intruder in a mad rage had frantically searched for something.

'The black files,' said Harrington. 'They should be OK. They were in our

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maximum security safe.
Thames House's vault was inspired by the American Fort Knox.
Constructed from steel and concrete, it was divided into several secure compartments. The safe door weighed over 20 tons and not one person knew the combination needed to
open it. Now, somehow, no longer exists.

"The vault door is gone," said Vernon. 'Vaporized. All files inside were taken or incinerated. There's nothing else. '
"But this was an impregnable vault.
"Commander, I saw it with my own eyes. It was completely destroyed, and the Cainite destiny has passed.

Harrington slumped in his chair. “But that was the key to it.”
'The forensic team is sifting through the wreckage,' said Vernon. 'The CCTV photos show a white light and nothing else. It's a mystery. "
Colonel Gresnick, who had been calmly drinking coffee on the corner, placed his cup
down. "Have you ever thought what we've been setting up? Maybe Ferris and Morson's real plan was to get here to steal The Cainite Destiny.
Vernon looked at the colonel in surprise. "Christ, a Trojan Horse: the oldest trick in the book."

Harrington turned on the TV image showing the inmates' cells.
Sergeant Morson was sitting exactly as before, while Captain Ferris was lying under his sheets, writhing and moaning.
"Poor thing," said Vernon. "I guess that's the end of that theory." He turned to Gresnick. 'Why do you think the prisoners might be interested in Cainite fate? You make it seem like it's something special. "

'The Cainite Destiny is the most valuable document in the world.'
'What do you mean?' Harrington shifted uneasily. "I'm one of only three people who've seen him in the last sixty-seven years. No one else has been anywhere near him. You couldn't know anything about
it." "That's where you're wrong," Gresnick replied. "My grandfather... he was the man
who translated.

15

Ucy's eyes opened, reluctantly. Sinclair was still on his knees, praying. 'De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine," he said in Latin.
Lucy knew those words very well. From the depths I cry to you, O Lord - the opening words of Psalm 129. Sometimes she thought she had

been marked in your heart. They were everyone's scream annihilated by pain.
The more shots rang out, Sinclair's voice became more desperate. "Vanitas vanitatum," he said, 'et omnia vanitas.
Lucy tilted her head. Vanity of vanities, and everything is vanity. How many times had she thought that since her parents died? Life had no point now. How could she, when the creators were dead, when love had been ripped from her forever?

She left the benches and tiptoed to the side door hidden behind black curtains.

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Red velvet. As quietly as possible, she opened the door and entered the hallway. A shot echoed in the next hallway, the one leading to the cafeteria. A soldier in a black uniform staggered into view and fell forward in the middle of the intersection of hallways.

Lucy looked at the man's head. Blood oozed from a hole in his lower jaw and spread across the floor. His eyes were open, but there was no life there. She tried to move, but couldn't. Everything is vanity. She wanted to curl me up, lay me down on the floor, and hope no one would hurt her.

In due time, the soldier's poor parents would learn about their son's death. His brothers and sisters would be devastated. His girlfriend, perhaps pregnant, would never recover: love destroyed just when more was needed. The entire tree of suffering, the branches sprouting in dozens of places, pain squeezing through the roots and spreading. Broken hearts falling like autumn leaves.

From the depths.
Feeling sick, she entered one of the bathrooms. A bucket of dirty water had been pushed into the corner, with an old mop outside. She poured some of the water onto the floor in front of one of the cubicles, then stuck an 'Out of Order' cleaning closet sign on the cubicle door and locked herself in. Landing on top of the toilet, she pulled her knees up his chin and tried not to make a sound. She closed her eyes. Minutes passed. No noise. Anything.

His mind flew back to Raphael's painting. Everything about him was wrong, or very right - and perhaps those achieved the same thing. When she tried to mentally reconstruct the mural, she discovered all the details were somehow imprinted in her memory, as if they had been with her forever.
Increasingly, she was convinced that she had seen this mural before...but she had no idea what that could be like.
God, the illusions were coming back, how else could I explain it? The more she concentrated, the more vivid the painting became. It turned into a 3-D representation that she could rotate and flip, view from any angle. Why does she feel like she knew her so well? In many ways, it was like a smaller-scale version of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling fresco. It had much the same religious iconography and told a similar story of Creation. Except there was something subtly different, some ambiguity. Maybe it was a mirror image, or not quite in focus. What she had no doubt was buried in these

images was a radically different story of humanity from what she had been taught in school.

She brought the top left panel to the forefront of her mind and studied it as if she were back at Oxford University. I thought Rusty processes bent into gear.

The panel showed a dazzling light show, full of rainbow lights that swirled like the wind, but in one corner it was darkness, a thick, ominous darkness. This must be a representation of the separation of light from darkness described in the Book of Genesis.
Moving clockwise to the next panel, Lucy felt uncomfortable but wasn't sure why. God was shown sitting on a throne made of diamonds, surrounded by a multitude of shining, translucent angels. But again there was a disquieting

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ingredient - a dark angel about to throw a spear at God. Lucy assumed this was a representation of Lucifer's rebellion against God.
Then, the same black angel fell to the earth holding the spear, surrounded by a torrent of black rain. Lucifer's expulsion from Heaven, presumably.

Next came the Garden of Eden, with a tree of knowledge in the shape of a human being with a large brain. Adam and Eve were naked in front of her. Near them, a serpent slithered over a strange emerald globe.
Then Cain, a surprisingly handsome figure, was depicted killing the swarthy Abel with a spear. Next was Cain having a strange double S mark, like two serpents, on his forehead. The Mark of Cain, Lucy assumed.
Behind Cain, there was a city with a high, gleaming tower. Lucy guessed this was the Tower of Babel.

Panel 7, top right showed God in a mystical cloud above the Ark of the Covenant in a tent - the Tabernacle - with Moses as the figure looking on. The next panel showed the gold Temple of Solomon with a High Priest praying in front of the Ark. Panel 9 was Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Another Jesus-like figure waited in the background. Lucy had no idea who this other person was, but for some reason she thought this number had immense significance.

Panel 10 showed Salome doing the seven-veiled dance for King Herod.
In the next panel, the severed head of John the Baptist rested on a gold, gem-encrusted plate. The eyes and mouth were open, and something about him reminded Lucy of Munch The Scream. Another man was being decapitated in the background. Lucy wondered if this was the same person who was shown earlier waiting to be baptized by John the Baptist. Who was he?

In panel 12, The Last Supper was depicted with 30 silver coins lying between Jesus and Judas. Affixed were a gold, jewel-encrusted dish containing bread and a beautiful chalice filled with wine - the Holy Grail.

Panel 13 in the lower right corner showed a Roman soldier thrusting a spear into Christ's side at the crucifixion, with a man, presumably Joseph of Arimathea, collecting blood at the Holy Grail.

Panel 14 presented the Resurrection. A crowd was witnessing the event, half of them cheering, the other half with deeply sad faces. Lucy couldn't understand why Raphael had painted some people so unhappy at this joyous event.

Panel 15 showed a siege of a mountaintop castle. Men were descending the mountain in the dark, while on the other side of the mountain, men and women were being burned at the stake in the dawn light.

Panel 16 was the most disconcerting of all the images: Lucy's own painting. How could it possibly have ended up in this collection of unknown masterpieces by one of the world's greatest artists?
Panel 17 apparently showed King Arthur's Camelot - a castle overlooking a raging sea. Panel 18 showed the battle of Camlann where Arthur, holding Excalibur, was killed by the spear of his nephew Mordred.

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In the background was a round chapel and a castle on a high hill surrounded by trees.
A cloud of dark crows hovered over the chapel.
The next panel featured a desolate land full of beggars in rags. In one corner there was a dark cave, with a pool in the center, full of stalactites and stalagmites. The other was a forest with a ruined abbey in the middle.
Panel 20 showed a mountain castle overlooking a lake in a wooded valley.
Painted directly onto the surface of the lake was the Holy Grail.
The next panel depicted the procession of the Grail Hallows: Spear, Sword,
Goblet and plate in front of the Fisher King, the guardian of the Grail Castle.
Panel 22 showed the Fisher King with a spear sticking out of his thigh.
As for the 23 panel, it was just bizarre. It was divided into four quarters, one of which showed a blue swastika on a white flag, the next a rising sun, the third a black and white flag, and the last a skull and crossbones. In the middle of the four flares was a circle containing a pyramid incorporating a fixed eye, with a phoenix hovering over the entire structure.

The last side panel was the most striking of all. He showed the city of Rome in a mirror. The Vatican was displayed upside down in an egg timer.
In the upper section of the timer was a miniature universe of dazzling lights.
Lucy's eyes widened. She could hear voices directly outside her cubicle, speaking in German. What is happening? The language changed. Cardinal Sinclair was with them, speaking in Italian. He was evidently angry.
Without warning, someone kicked the cubicle door open. A soldier looked at Lucy, a machine gun slung over his shoulder. 'If you want to live, you have to come with me
immediately,' he said in good English. 'I don't want to'.

The soldier grabbed his machine gun and aimed it at her. "Then I'll kill you.

16

Our grandfather was Professor Reinhardt Weiss of the University of Cambridge? ' Harrington asked, looking confused.
Gresnick nodded. "He moved to Harvard in late 1945 because of the way MI5 treated him.
They agreed his translation of The Cainite Destiny was accurate, but said the document was manifestly meaningless."
Vernon Caldwell remembered what he had said about Cainite destiny. Now Gresnick went to confirm. He wondered if he should confront Harris
about his accessing The Cainite Destiny in the last 24 hours. He decided to wait.

'Reinhardt Weiss signed the Official Secrets Act," Harrington said. "He agreed that he would not discuss the matter with anyone."
"My grandfather said you were all blind. If you weren't willing to help, he was prepared to go it
alone. He made his life's work to discover the truth behind The Cainite Destiny. Before he died, he spent his entire His work for his daughter, my mother. She is now a professor of History at
Harvard University.

When my mother got married, she was sure she was one of the greatest authorities on

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esoteric studies. My father, at Yale University, was his perfect match. '
Vernon felt sick. Esoteric Studies was what Lucy taught at Oxford.
Would Lucy - the old Lucy, rather than the shadow she had become - be attracted to Gresnick with her Hollywood good looks and her expertise in all the same things she loved?

"Your grandfather made an unauthorized copy of The Cainite Destiny? Harrington was irate. "He bequeathed it to your daughter and she to you, is that
it? '
Gresnick nodded.
'Commander,' Vernon interrupted, 'I know for a fact that you accessed The Destiny Cainite yesterday.
Gresnick looked at Harrington with sudden curiosity.
"How...? Harrington shook his head. "It doesn't matter." He stared into space.
"When I joined MI5 from Oxford, I was appointed special assistant to the then Director General.
One night, shortly before he was fired, he got drunk in his office. He was in a strange mood. I think he knew he was about to get kicked out. "If the world always seems like it's going to end," he told me, "look for a document in our archives.
It's called The Cainite Destiny. I swear to you, Harrington, it brings me to a sweat when I think about it. "

'The DG then made one of the strangest comments I have ever heard. "If none of this is true," he said, "we are kidding ourselves that we know nothing. That means there are people out there who are part of an incredible secret that the

rest of us can only guess - the secret history of the world, a stranger world than we could ever imagine."

Harrington shrugged. "I had a quick look at the document out of simple curiosity, but it didn't make any sense. I agreed with the official assessment that it was nonsense. I honestly don't remember much about it. The Spear of Destiny was significant - that's all that left an impression on me.

Gresnick half-smiled, then slid out a paper from one of his folders.
"My grandfather knew the document would be buried and forgotten. He couldn't let that happen. Although The Cainite Destiny was disconcerting, my grandfather recognized it as a key to something surprising: the re-interpretation of history based on ideas we, in the West never dared to take it seriously." He placed the paper in the center of the table. "This is my grandfather's translation of Cainite destiny.

March 12, 1938

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Schatzkammer, Hofburg Palace, Vienna

How to begin? I am shaking as I write these words. Himmler made us

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swear to record nothing that happened today. I have never disobeyed him in my life, and my only excuse now is that these are private words that only I have ever read. I want to be able to relive today for the rest of what, I pray, will be my brief future in this world.
We arrived at the Imperial Treasury at noon. Himmler ordered the Austrian team to leave and then twelve of us entered, one from each of the original twelve priesthood families. It made me shudder to think that we must have looked just like Cain's original twelve priests. Just as they wore black robes and carried the death's head mark on their silver rings, we were all in our black SS uniforms, with the skull emblem resplendent on our caps.

The Führer, in his brown leather coat, followed us in. Cain himself could not have looked more regal. If anyone was marked by destiny as our liberator, it was the Führer. We formed two lines, gave the Roman salute and shouted, "Heil Hitler!" as he passed us.

Following him, we walked through the Imperial Regalia of the Holy Roman Empire, ignoring the shiny trinkets. Already, we feel the presence of Lance. I imagined that the
legions of martyrs who fought for so long to avenge our Lord, to bring us back to the true light, marched behind us.

For thousands of years, the Enemy's pursuit of us has never wavered. They hanged us, beheaded us, drowned us, burned us alive, disemboweled us, did everything in their power to exterminate us. There have always been traitors, infiltrators, spies, deserters, traitors, the weak and the cowards,

but the Secret Doctrine survived all attempts to destroy it. And now the Spear of Destiny was about to be ours.
It was in an ordinary glass cabinet - the world's most sacred relic, the most powerful object ever created, resting on a red velvet cushion. It was under their noses the whole time and never saw the truth. Born in ignorance, mired in error, condemned by its stupidity. They deserve all the horror that will soon be unleashed upon them.

Sunlight called to Spearhead and it shone as if bathed in the light of the one true God. I could practically reach out and touch the weapon that would set us free forever. The
words of legend came back to me: The man who wields the Spear of Destiny will control the destiny of the world. We knew the legend better than anyone: it was our legend. We only knew where the Spear originated, the identity of its true owner and the reason why it was made.

The Führer gave a signal to SS-Hauptsturmführer Neumann. He opened the closet and the Führer walked past him and held the spear.
When he raised it in his right hand, the spearhead glowed, just as the legend said it would. We all clicked our heels and shouted, "Sieg Heil!"
"Our search is coming to an end," said the Führer. 'Cain's destiny is almost fulfilled.

I wanted to cry when I heard those words. I looked at the two sig runes that made up my SS insignia. Sig to victory. Follow for revenge. Sig Sig - the mark of the Enemy, once branded on
us to humiliate us, but now worn with pride. He reminded us every day what we had to do.

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'The creature's box is in Chartres Cathedral,' the Führer continued, 'and it will be ours, as soon as we conquer France.
When he raised the spear above his head, everyone knelt.
"After France falls, England will be powerless," he said. "Then we will locate the remaining two Hallow Grails and end this once and for all."
He ordered us out, then was left alone with the spear for over an hour. When he came out, he wasn't talking, but it was obvious that something had changed. I can't begin to
describe the strange look in his eyes.
"Our enemy has not begun to suspect our true nature," he said. "They call us warmongers, fascists, totalitarians. Not for a second did they conceive who we really are. Soon we will bring humanity to its
greatest and most unexpected gift.

He smiled in a way I had never seen before, as if he knew the great burden he carried would soon be lifted.

“Don't you feel it?” he commented, and I could swear he was shaking. "It's almost here."
Then he said the words they had waited so long to hear. "The end of the world '.

17

Arrington brushed aside the translation as if he found everything about it in bad taste. 'You know no one has ever satisfactorily explained it. Your grandfather offered
a lot of speculation, but not facts. We didn't think we would ever find out what it meant. I suppose you will say now that you understand completely.'

'You were not chosen for this mission by chance,' Gresnick replied. "When I was at West Point, I wrote a dissertation on the influence of mysticism and occultism on the Nazi war effort in World
War II. Once the DAI established a Nazi liaison for Delta Force deserters, I was called in."

'So what do you think Fate means Cainites, Colonel? "
"I don't have any harder facts than my grandfather did, but I'm as sure as he was that the mystery can be solved. You have to realize that the Nazis were very strange."

'This is not news.
"I assure you, Commander Harrington, you have no idea how strange they were.
When I wrote my thesis, I had to shorten it because I didn't want the DIA to
think I had gone crazy. I said that some senior Nazis - Himmler in particular - were interested in mysticism, but that it was little more than a sideshow. What I really thought was that mysticism was at the heart of Nazism. The Nazis were nothing but an ordinary political party, and the war they fought was unlike anything that had gone before. They were more like religious fanatics fighting a Crusade, but it wasn't conventional God they believed in.

Vernon flicked his thumb against his index finger as Gresnick gave an account of secret Nazi beliefs. It was difficult to credit his story. Apparently, many of those who helped create the Nazi party were

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members of the Thule-Gesellschaft - the Thule Society. They believed that the mythical land known in ancient times as Thule was the home of a blue-eyed, blonde,
Aryan master race - the original Germans - who later populated the famous Atlantis.
Thule was said to be Iceland, Greenland or somewhere near the North Pole. The central part of the Nazi dream was to recreate
Thule/Atlantis on a global scale, with Aryans restored to their divine status and everyone else enslaved. He was a member of the Thule Society, which chose the swastika, an ancient Aryan symbol, as the Nazi emblem. Furthermore, members of the Thule Society were well known for their virulent anti-Semitism. The SS had a special division called the Forschungs Ahnenerbe und Lehrgemeinschaft -
Ancestral Heritage Research and Teaching Society, nicknamed the Nazi Occult Bureau by its enemies. His task was to find scientific, anthropological,
and archaeological evidence to support the Thule Society's theories. They went on an expedition to Tibet because there was a legend that the descendants
of the original Thule master race

they settled there. Legend has it that there were huge underground caves in Tibet where the descendants of the first master race still lived in hi-tech cities in an underground paradise. These hidden Aryans were masters of an astonishing occult power known as vril. It was one of the Ahnenerbe's tasks to make contact with the people in these cities and learn the secrets of vril.
Until the end of World War II, the Nazis believed there was a secret weapon that would save them. The weapon he had in mind was virile.
When Russian troops entered Berlin in 1945, they made one of the most extraordinary discoveries of the war. They found a thousand Tibetan monks dressed in
SS uniforms in a destroyed bomb barracks, all of whom had committed ritual suicide. These monks were the Third Reich's last, futile attempt to harness vril as WMD to repel the Red Army.
"I can see why you kept it a secret," Vernon said.
"Wait a minute." Harrington was playing with his cufflinks. "Do you think it's possible that it's real?" One would imagine that an unusual energy release was behind all the disturbances we have seen lately.
Gresnick shrugged. 'I can't rule it out. But for all the attacks on holy relics. That doesn't fit, does it?'
“Well, we know that the Ark of the Covenant was treated by the
ancient Hebrews as a kind of WMD. Maybe vril sacred objects can channel in some way.” Harrington's face flushed. 'Jesus, am I really saying this?
'I've heard of vril before," said Vernon. "It's the stuff you put in Bovril. He smiled awkwardly.

'This is precisely where Bovril gets its name' Gresnick said.
"Bovine vril. 'What?'
'Forget Bovril,' Harrington snapped. 'If, for the sake of argument, we accept the Nazis were occultists, where does the Spear of Destiny come in?'
Gresnick frowned. "It comes up in Arthurian mythology, and this was
another thing that the Nazis were obsessed with. In Himmler's Wewelsburg castle, the central banqueting hall contained a round table. Years before the outbreak of World War II, Himmler sent an officer from SS called Otto Rahn to the south of

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France to search for the Holy Grail. Rahn was convinced that the last owners of the Grail were a heretical sect called the Cathars, exterminated by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. They were the first people to face the Inquisition - in fact, it was invented specifically to deal with them. Rahn thought that the Cathars were descendants of Celtic druids and that they were steeped in the legends surrounding King Arthur. '

"We're going back to Lucy's book, aren't we?" said Vernon. "She used the work of Otto Rahn as one of her primary sources, and the Cathars featured heavily in her writings."

"Actually, I know very little about Lucy's book," Gresnick commented. "It was never published in the United States."
"The world wasn't ready for Lucy," Vernon said flatly.
"I hope you have a good memory, Mr. Vernon. I need to know exactly what Lucy's theory was. She may have inadvertently stumbled upon the key to this whole thing."

18

the hat..." Vernon was about to respond when all the lights flickered and walked out. The temperature plummeted.
'Christ, what's going on?' Gresnick blurted.
"It must be a generator failure," Harrington said. 'Backup should launch soon.'
Vernon looked into the darkness. "This was not a generator failure...
'What do you mean?'
"Don't you feel it? When the lights went out... some kind of presence...'." Get a grip on yourself," Harrington said. 'You can't be falling for this hokum upon the angels. "

The lights came on again, and the room warmed up. "You see - simple technical failure.
“I felt something very,' Gresnick said. “It was the strangest thing. Like some source of enormous power being activated.
"Well, it's over," Harrington said. "We're all a little nervous. Our imaginations getting a little overactive, I dare say.

Vernon called Gary Caldwell and asked if anything unusual was happening.
Caldwell said security teams were sweeping the building, trying to find out who was responsible for the attack on the archives department. Badly damaged electrical, among the wreckage had short circuit and hit the primary generator.
“Satisfied?” said Harrington. "Nothing mysterious. Now, let's get started with this. You were about to tell us about Lucy's book."

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Vernon poured a glass of water and took a long drink. He was agitated and felt embarrassed. He asked us to focus. "Yes, Lucy's book. He corrected her before she submitted it to her publisher. It wasn't exactly his field, but he still remembered more of it - one of the benefits of being a research analyst. Since he was a boy, he had been able to quickly absorb a large amount of complex material, and

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I was often able to recall bits and pieces of it years later. It helped that he was really fascinated by Lucy's work.

"Lucy's starting point was an old book by an English folklorist called Jessie Weston," he began. 'Weston claimed that the Grail legends were a reworking of ancient fertility rituals from ancient Egypt, Babylon and Greece. She went through each of the main aspects of the Grail stories and showed how they were similar to features of the myths about the ancient gods Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis and Attis.
'Lucy agreed with Weston about the Grail legends being a representation of something, but she disagreed that fertility rites were involved. His idea was that a particular group of people produced the Grail stories to preserve their beliefs from an enemy they never managed to defeat. “The Cathars, right?
'Gresnick interrupted.
Vernon nodded.
'Well,' Harrington interjected, 'they may both be experts, but all I know about the Cathars is that they came from Languedoc in southwestern France, and I only know that because I went once on a weekend trip. to Carcassonne to see the walled city, which turned out to be the capital of the Cathar country.
'OK, I'll give you my one minute introduction to the Cathars," said Vernon. "They were one of the strangest sects in history. Its name comes from the ancient Greek word meaning pure

katharoi. The Cathars, the pure ones, were famous for living good, simple lives. They had few possessions, were peace-loving, vegetarian, and frowned upon sex.

"Many ordinary Catholics looked at the ascetic life of the Cathars and thought it seemed much holier, much more Christ-like than most Catholics, especially the priests and monks, who were notoriously despicable at that time. Before long, many Catholics began to convert to Catharism.
"The Catholic Church was not slow to see the danger. Realizing war was coming, perhaps a war of extermination, and that their beliefs might be lost forever, the Cathars desperately thought about how they could pass on their religion to future generations . They had to come up with something that communicated their beliefs without attracting the suspicions of the Catholic Church. The legend of the Holy Grail was their solution. On the one hand, it seemed like an orthodox Catholic story, but it was the opposite - pure heresy. It is a simple fact that, before the Grail romances appeared, there was not a single mention of anything called the Holy Grail, and no legend saying that Joseph of Arimathea was its original keeper. Even as early as 1260, the legend of the Holy Grail it was known not to be an authentic Christian story." Following Otto Rahn's line of thought, Lucy argued that the Grail legends described in codified form, the initiation ceremonies and religious rites of the Cathars, but now transformed into stories of chivalry. Everything was symbolic, all the characters in the stories carefully chosen. Many of the troubadours, the great romantic poets of the Middle Ages, were Cathars and brought all their art to bear on the creation of legends. These were

the greatest novels ever imagined, inspiring everyone who reads them, and unconsciously feeding them incredibly powerful heretical ideas.

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"Meanwhile, relations with the Catholic Church continued to deteriorate. Pope Innocent III decided on drastic action. He ordered a crusade against the Cathars and on 24 June 1209, the feast day of Saint John the Baptist - one of the days holiest of the Cathars" - the crusader army set out from Lyon.

"Although the Cathars did not approve of violence, they fought, mainly using mercenaries, and the war dragged on for decades. In 1231, the next Pope, Gregory IX, created an institution to stamp out the heresy once and for all - the Inquisition. In 1243, the Cathars made what was effectively their last stand for their stronghold in the mountains of Montségur. The Catholic army besieged it for months before the garrison finally surrendered in 1244. Those in the garrison who refused to renege on their heresy were burned. in the mass bonfire at the foot of the mountain."

'OK, I'll take the picture," said Harrington. "An orthodox religion is eliminated by a much larger religion and tries to survive somehow, hiding its beliefs in the form of a story that lives on after the religion has died, giving hope that the religion may be reborn someday."

Vernon nodded again.

'So what was Lucy's theory about these hidden meanings? Why was her work controversial? I mean, what did she say that Rahn didn't? '

"According to basic legend, the Grail is the maintenance of a man named King Fisher, who lives in Grail Castle, surrounded by warrior monks. He has a mysterious wound on your thigh, or even on your genitals, which never heals. Lucy was curious about the use of the title Fisher King. The symbol of the fish was known since ancient times to represent divine life. Only one person can offer divine life, and so Lucy argued that to Fisher King must be another name for God. The worthy - the Cathars - would be caught in their fishing nets while the unworthy - the Catholics - would swim through it. It is sad to God that so many fish in the sea could not be saved. They were his metaphorical wound that never healed. Only when all humanity returned to him did the wound disappear.

'King Fisher's Grail Castle, hidden from the unworthy, was heaven, the Wasteland outside, hell. The Wasteland would disappear only when the Fisher King was healed, and that would only happen when Catharism triumphed.

'Lucy wanted to know how those from the Wasteland could find the hidden Grail castle. Only those who rejected their old, false beliefs and began seeking the truth - Catharism - would succeed, she stated. In the castle, they would be shown a solemn ceremony where the Grail Relics - a spear, cup, plate and sword - would be presented to them.

'If they understood the meaning of the ceremony - which would mean that they had been fully initiated into Catharism - the Grail seekers would know to ask the Fisher King a particular question. If they failed to make the right question, because they were still clinging to the false doctrines of other religions, they left the castle and never found it again.

'Lucy thought that the Hallows Grail should be separated into two pairs: the spear and the chalice, the sword and the plate. The first pair represented Christianity. The spear was the Roman spear thrust to Christ's side at the crucifixion, and

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Christ used the cup during the Last Supper.

"What about the sword and plate?" asked Harrington.

"That's the radical part of Lucy's theory. She said the sword was the one used to decapitate John the Baptist. His head was placed on a plate to be presented to Salome who rewarded her for dancing for King Herod. So the sword and plate went to John the Baptist instead of Christ. Grail candidates had to choose between the two pairs. If you chose correctly, you were a true believer, otherwise you were condemned.

"I don't understand," Gresnick said. "Are you saying that Lucy thought there was some kind of opposition between John the Baptist and Jesus?

"Exactly, Colonel. People forget that John the Baptist was only six years older than Jesus, and that they were related by blood. Their mothers were cousins. Some people thought John was more important than Jesus. Lucy believes that the Cathars were descendants of an early Gnostic sect called the Johannites who considered John the Baptist the true Messiah. Jesus, so the story goes, was just one of John's disciples. Jesus openly said, "Nothing is greater than John. He is more than a prophet. "In other words, Jesus himself recognized that John was the true Messiah. But things changed and Jesus decided to betray John, and one of his fellow conspirators was Salome. That's why she asked for John's head. There is supposedly a gospel called The Gospel According to Salome, suppressed by early Christian leaders, which relates to the entire sordid tale.

"In the book, Salome states that Caiaphas, the high priest of the Temple was a secret follower of John the Baptist, as were Pontius Pilate, Judas Iscariot, and the Roman soldier who stuck a spear in Jesus. All of them had sworn to avenge John, and the later Johannites revered of them all.

Pilate, in particular, was an extraordinary individual. Very little has been officially recorded about his life, but it is likely that he was born at Fortingall in Scotland, the son of a Druid and related to a Scottish tribal chief called Metallanus. Metallanus wanted to establish good relations with Rome, so he sent the children of several important families in Rome to be educated as Romans, with Roman names. Pilate was one of these. The Royal Scots, the oldest regiment in the British Army, claim descent from Pontius Pilate's bodyguards.

With his Druid family background, Pilate was highly receptive to the Gnostic message.

'The Knights Templar were also believed to be Johannites. Every Grand Master of the Templar Order bore the name John. The Catholic Church accused the Templars of worshiping a severed head called Baphomet. Lucy said this was none other than the preserved head of John the Baptist. At your trial by the Inquisition, the Templars were accused of stepping on and spitting on the Christian cross. Again, this makes perfect sense according to Lucy's theory. Even the Templars' famous red cross was far from conventional. It was not a Latin cross with unequal arms of the kind that Jesus was crucified on, but the pattée cross with equal arms. This allowed them to disguise themselves as Christians while actually showing that they were not Christians at all to those who understood the symbolism.

"That's a theory," Gresnick said.

"Why is Delta Force so interested in Lucy's ideas? Asked Harrington. "My

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"Our guess is that Lucy rediscovered or elaborated on something the Nazis
knew about the Holy Grail," Gresnick said. "Otto Rahn, in two books Kreuzzug gegen den Gral
- Crusade against the Grail, and Luzifers Hofgesinf - Lucifer's Court, had already presented the case that
the Grail Romances were a coded reference to Catharism.
Like her, he said that the quest for the Holy Grail was a symbolic representation of the Cathars' search for
God. The Hallows Grail Procession was a reconstruction of the Cathars' most sacred initiation ceremony.

Harrington tapped the table with his fingers. 'Is there any concrete proof that the Cathars wrote the Grail
stories? "

Gresnick twirled the pen between his fingers. "The evidence is circumstantial but compelling.
"And what about the theory that the Cathars and the Knights Templar were closely related?

"Again, circumstantial, but convincing. The Templars' main powerbase was in Languedoc, exactly
where the Cathars lived. Many Templars came from Cathar families. The Templars refused to join in with
the Cathars' persecution of the Catholic Church, although , as elite Catholic crusaders, they should have led
the attack.
In fact, they were suspected of giving refuge to many prominent Cathars.
"The Cathars were subjected to a savage Crusade by knights from northern France, had to endure all the rigors
of the Inquisition and were eventually eliminated. A few decades later, the Templars were arrested by knights
from northern France, accused of heresy, brought into faced the Inquisition and eradicated. History repeats
itself, don't you think?
"My grandfather was convinced that the Cathars and the Templars were created by the same people, and,
like Lucy, he thought they both traced their roots back to the Johannite followers of John the Baptist. The Cathars
were a clear challenge to the Catholic Church , while the Templars were more like a fifth column,
pretending to be orthodox but in fact completely heretical. The secrecy required of each member of the Templars
was the perfect way to ensure that no one discovered the truth about them. New members were warned of
retribution terrible that would be taken against them if they never revealed any of the Order's secrets.
They would have their tongues removed,

their eyes pricked, and their hearts taken out of their cases while still beating.
"That sounds like the oaths Freemasons take," said Vernon.
'That's no coincidence,' Gresnick said. 'The Freemasons were probably founded by the Templars. They were
the next step in the revolt against Catholicism.

"So, you're saying that the Cathars, Templars, and Freemasons are all the same thing?"

"I believe so. The papacy has banned Catholics from becoming Freemasons and accused
the Freemasons of worshiping a false god. The Freemasons' ceremonies and rites are all connected with
Solomon's Temple, and the proper name of the Knights Templar is the Order of the Poor Knights of
Solomon's Temple.
Harrington leaned forward. 'OK, for the sake of argument, let's say you're right. How does the Nazis fit in? Are
you insinuating that they are linked to the Cathars and the Templars as well?

Gresnick gave a sardonic smile. "I have no conclusive proof, but it is known that Himmler thought of the SS as
an order of knights: like the modern successors

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of the Knights Templar and their Germanic counterparts, the Teutonic Knights. He was obsessed with the Spear of Destiny and the Holy Grail, both of which are heavily linked to the Templars. The Holy Grail was rumored to be the most sacred treasure of the Cathars. Otto Rahn, an expert on the Cathars, was personally appointed to the SS by Himmler and was sent on expeditions to Languedoc to look for him. There is no doubt Himmler was fascinated by the Cathars and the Templars, but I think it goes further than that. The Destiny Cainite suggests that the Nazis thought they could trace their lineage back to Cain and I think two of the stopping points in the Nazi ancestry are the Cathars and the Knights Templar. When Otto Rahn was exploring caves in the Sabartez Mountains in Languedoc, he found hidden chambers where the walls were inscribed with symbols of the Templars and the Cathars, side by side. There were also representations of the Spear of Destiny, the Holy Grail and the Ark of the Covenant."

“Do you know what you did?” said Vernon. "You've switched on just about every conspiracy theory imaginable: Atlantis, Cathars, Druids, the Freemasons, Nazis, the Knights Templar, the Ark of the Covenant, the Spear of Destiny, the Holy Grail - . They're all there'

"What if all the conspiracies we are familiar with are subsets of a much larger conspiracy?" Gresnick responded. 'A superconspiracy, if you will. than that. So we are always left with unanswered questions and room for new conspiracy theories. But, with the superconspiracy, every minor conspiracy is explained, every answer given, every loose end tied up. All together, there are no separate conspiracies, just a huge misunderstood conspiracy.

'What would your superconspiracy be then?' Vernon asked. 'Who is doing the conspiracy and who or what are they conspiring against?

"Don't you see? - Every conspiracy is linked with religion. What the Knights Templar were really up to, what the Cathars really believed, Why the Catholic Church hated and feared them so much, what was the ultimate Nazi goal, what was the Quest for the Holy Grail is really about what power the Spear of Destiny actually has, what the Ark of the Covenant actually used for, and so on.

'What are you saying, Colonel? "Asked Harrington. "It's simple. Every conspiracy comes back to one thing only -. The identity of the true God " Gresnick began to make a chopping gesture with his hand, as if he was cutting the problem into pieces. "Imagine you were in a world where you knew the truth, but were forced under penalty of death to embrace a lie. Openly expressing your opinions would kill you, so you were forced to create secrets and codes that your enemies wouldn't notice or understand. But his enemies were not stupid.

They cracked its codes, exposed its secrets and killed in large numbers. Survivors had to create increasingly complex codes and pass on keys to unlock them. What if the keys were lost? And then? Without the keys, the codes would eventually become incomprehensible; its true meaning lost. Unless, of course, there was a group that never lost the key, that kept the secret perfectly intact from the beginning and through everything thrown at them by their enemies.

"Are you saying that such a group exists?" Gresnick nodded but did not elaborate.

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"Well, are you going to tell us?"
"I think when Section 5 interrogated Nazi officers in 1945, they were told what the conspiracy was. I think half of Section 5 went along with it and the other half didn't. The half they bought killed the others to stop them reveal the secret."
'That's unlikely, don't you think? "Vernon commented. "Why should some be persuaded and the others not, and why should the former be willing to kill the latter?
Of course, the evidence has to be irrefutable, in which case everyone would have believed it. "

Gresnick shook his pen against a pitcher of water. "But what if the half who believed had a particular reason to believe, and the others didn't?
"I don't follow.
"Well, imagine the Nazis provided physical proof of their claims. In fact, imagine the only reason they revealed the conspiracy in the first place was that they knew that some of the Americans were sure to believe them because of that proof.

Vernon had to intervene. "Some of the Americans had a mark on them, is that what you're telling us? A mark that meant they and the Nazis were somehow on the same side.

"That's exactly what I'm saying." What type of brand? Harrington asked.
"The most famous mark of all, sir. Gresnick pointed to his forehead. 'The Mark of Cain."

Hink about it. Half of Section 5 murder their colleagues and preserve the Nazis' secret. They go home to America and involve their children, and later, their grandchildren, in a conspiracy.
It would have to be something dramatic that would make them do it, which eliminated any possibility of doubt. My grandfather's theory was that
there was more than just a historical link between the elite members of the Cathars, the Knights Templar, the Freemasons and the Nazis. There was a physical connection too - They were
related by blood, and they all bore the mark of Cain."

"But the mark of Cain, if I remember correctly, was a red crescent-shaped mark that appeared on Cain's forehead," Vernon said. "It would have been obvious if every surviving member of Section 5 had a distinctive mark on their forehead."
"The truth is, no one knows what the mark of Cain looked like. It was not explicitly described in the Bible. My grandfather speculated that the mark appeared only when
it was activated by the presence of a specific sacred object.
He had the Spear of Destiny in mind."
'Why in particular? Harrington asked.
"My grandfather was convinced it wasn't a Roman spear at all. He was much older. In fact, he thought it was actually the weapon used to kill Cain Abel. It pretty much says as much in Cainite destiny. That's why that which was so revered by the Nazis. It seemed to have special powers. Perhaps it
revealed hidden marks."

'This is just speculation.

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'Conventional approaches haven't got us anywhere, Commander. Scientists have no idea what's going on in the world right now. They don't have a single theory among them.'

“But that’s so unlikely.
"And when Dr. Wells says one of our prisoners is becoming an angel, isn't he? To use a cliché, it's time to think outside the box."
'Well, tell me as much. I remember reading somewhere that the Holy Grail wasn't an object at all – it was Jesus' bloodline or something. What do you think it is?'

"Listen, the reason the Holy Grail is so mysterious is that no one has ever been clear what it is. That was on purpose, of course. The best way to camouflage something is to give it multiple identities or no identity at all."

'Well, how much do we know about this? There must be a beginning. It must be something even if it is a coded thing.

'OK, here's the quick story of the Holy Grail. The three main Grail Romances all appeared in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, just when the Cathars realized they were living on borrowed time. The first person to mention the Grail was a man named Chrétien de Troyes, who lived in the second half of the 12th century. It is not known when, where and when he was born and when, where he died. His life was shrouded in mystery - exactly what you'd expect from someone with secrets to hide, someone who didn't want to be too obvious. In fact, it's not even clearing your name really was. Chrétien is French Christian and Troyes is simply a French town, so Chrétien de Troyes is literally 'Christian of Troyes.' In fact, perhaps he is just a Christian from Troyes. It's not telling us much, is it?

"Robert de Boron was the next person to write about the Grail. De Boron was a French knight who fought in the Holy Land as a crusader. He was the first of the Grail writers to introduce an unmistakable Christian theme into the story of the Grail, identifying it a with the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper, which Joseph of Arimathea later used to collect the last drops of Christ's blood.It was Robert of Boron who said Joseph brought the Grail to Glastonbury in England.

"Then no doubt you don't think it's a coincidence that Lucy is at Glastonbury," said Harrington.

"It's no coincidence at all. Anyway, the third main player in Grail stories was Wolfram von Eschenbach. As with the others, some facts are known to him. Many suspected that he was one of the Knights Templar, and he explicitly stated the Templars were the guardians of the Grail. This was long before the Templars were suspected of heresy. Interestingly, he claimed to have been told the story of the Grail by a man named Kyot from southwestern France. Even less is known about Kyot from about by Wolfram von Eschenbach, but some experts think Kyot was both a troubadour and one of the Cathars.

"My grandfather believed all three authors of the Grail knew each other and were writing different versions of the Grail legend to sow confusion and make it impossible for any outsiders to make sense of the story. I mean, these three writers

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produced three different Grails, one of which was very Christian, and the other two almost Christian.
So this meant that no one could be sure what you were talking about when you spoke of the Grail. If the Inquisition asked, you could say that the Grail was Jesus' cup. If someone asked, you could say it was one of the non-Christian objects.
And what were the other objects?
"The word "Grail" comes from the Old French word graal, which comes from the Medieval Latin word gradalis, meaning dish. Thus, when Chrétien de Troyes first mentioned the
Grail, he was talking about a dish. He described it as made of gold and inlaid with jewels. Robert de Boron, the second

Grail writer then said it was Jesus' cup. Arguably, a deep, small plate may not be very different from a cup, so this is not a big leap, but Wolfram von Eschenbach denied that it was either a cup or a plate. He said it was a stone of a very pure kind, and he gave it another name - lapsit exillas.

"A dying human being who held the stone would not die, he said, and whoever possessed the stone would never age. Lapsit exillas was poor Latin and posed yet another mystery.
Some scholars thought he intended to say lapis lapsus ex Caelis meaning the stone fell from the sky. Alternatively, it could have meant lapis philosophorum – the philosopher's stone. This was the miraculous object sought by alchemists that could transform common metals into gold, provide an elixir of life, and cure all diseases. Later, Wolfram said that the stone was an emerald jewel from Lucifer's crown that fell to the ground when Lucifer's army fought God's army and lost.

So, make your choice.
Vernon looked at the globe the prisoner had brought inside 'Don't you think...
"He pointed to the object.
'Do you think this is an emerald from Lucifer's crown? Gresnick smiled.
"Well, look what he supposedly did to the prisoner."
'He's not doing anything to me, is he?' Gresnick held it up to the light and looked at him.
"I said we'd have it checked out, but it looks like a cheap glass sphere to me.

"Give it to me." Vernon took the ball from Gresnick, held it for a moment and then, without warning, dropped it to the ground.
'What the hell do you think you're doing?' Harrington shouted.
Vernon caught the ball. "Whatever it is, it's not glass.
'You can't be suggesting that we have the Holy Grail here with us now.' Vernon shrugged. "I'm not sure what I'm saying."
There was a knock on the door. A soldier opened it and Caldwell entered, looking flushed. 'It's better to look at the TV.
'Why?' Harrington asked. 'What happened?' The Ark of the Covenant has just been found. 'What?' "It's in the middle of the
South Lawn of the White House."

he the men on BBC News 24. The reporter was talking excitedly, barely managing to stop garbling her words. He was framed

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against a long shot from the White House, lit up in the dark.
"I just came from a press conference," he said. "The press secretary announced that an hour ago, a security incident occurred outside the White House perimeter. A military truck drove up to the front doors. The driver got out, was picked up by a motorbike and drove off. No trace of him was found.

"The Secret Service suspected that the truck contained a fertilizer bomb and ordered the evacuation of the White House. An anonymous caller then contacted the White House press office, stating that the Ark of the Covenant stolen from Ethiopia was in a box in the back of the truck.The call was recorded and played back to us.

"The caller, British and well-spoken, said that the world had become atheist and that the coordinated thefts of religious icons three days ago were intended to shake the world into re-engaging with the divine, or suffer the consequences. The Spear of Destiny and The Holy Grail would also be returned if the box were unloaded in the center of the White House lawn, in full view of the world.

"What better demonstration of divine power against earthly vanity could there be," the caller said, "than to have the supreme symbol of God placed on the lawn of the center of world power. It is time for the people of the world to choose from a once and for all where your royal alliances lie."

"The press secretary announced that the Secret Service were convinced that, in the unlikely event that the Ark was actually inside the box, it was probably accompanied by a WMD - a dirty bomb more than likely - and strongly advised against unloading it. They wanted to drive the truck to the military base, or carry out a controlled detonation.

"However, we have been informed that President Adams, famous for his born-again Christianity, has nullified the Secret Service. "A God-fearing nation has nothing to fear from God," he apparently declared. "He will never harm us ." 'Then, in the last fifteen minutes, the truck, driven by a service secret volunteer, was hospitalized due to the White House. We are now waiting for the box to be removed from the back and placed on the brightly lit South Lawn, in front of the world's television cameras.

The presenter in the BBC studio appeared. "We are interrupting Tim's report to bring you live footage of the grid being unloaded by US Marines.
This is an extraordinary development. For thousands of years, people believed that the Ark of the Covenant was irretrievably lost. If this really is the Ark, then we are looking at a miraculous time machine, taking us back to the time of Moses. Some claim that God himself resides within the Ark. In the next few minutes, we will discover the truth for ourselves.

The camera shot showed the Marines maneuvering the heavy box onto the lawn and carefully dismantling it, eventually revealing an object under a red velvet cover. One of the Marines went ahead and removed the lid.
Vernon, Harrington, Gresnick and Caldwell all gasped at the same time. I don't doubt that everyone looking around the world was reacting in exactly the same way.

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The Ark was beautiful beyond imagination. The camera zooms in on the chest bearing bright gold engravings of biblical scenes. It appeared

literally made in heaven. Its lid had a golden crown, and on each side were two golden rings, in which two golden poles were placed. On top of the lid there were two winged creatures, the famous cherubs, made of solid gold, with their faces facing each other and their outstretched wings almost touching. The wings formed a bench - a throne for God, according to the Bible. 'It's all true,' Harrington said, 'everything I said on the subject.

Vernon shook his head and looked at Gresnick. 'You can't be buying this.
The colonel seemed even more impressed than Harrington. 'My grandfather's
theories don't sound so crazy now, do they? 'This is as suspicious as hell," Vernon
he muttered.

'Look,' Caldwell blurted, 'President Adams is walking toward her.
The camera followed the president as he moved toward the ark, hands in prayer. He circled around for a few seconds, tears streaming down his face. He closed his eyes, as if he couldn't believe that Moses' world had come to life in the 21st century.

He knelt in front of him, with the two cherubs directly in front of him. He spread his hands and began to recite the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come..."

And then the Ark exploded.

21

ucy wanted to go slower. The streets near the convent were too narrow, too twisting, for vehicles traveling at high speeds. Above all, there was darkness. It was one o'clock in the morning,
so it must be dark, but it's not dark. It had a special quality, as if additional layers of black had been added.

It was thicker, cloudier, more resistant to light. The vehicles' headlight beams
were swallowed almost before they lit the way.
To Lucy it seemed that her life had become full of lights like these, the ones who hadn't managed to get as far as those in other people's lives. Everyone else had their bright, wide beams illuminating everything they did. They
were all so sure of the direction in which they were going. It had been like that once.

Once.

She was in a convoy of five black Land Rovers: 4-door Defender 110s. The soldiers, twenty or so of them, had smuggled out the chapel's back door and made a run for the Land Rovers, parked on an old sports field. Cardinal Sinclair was pushed into the lead vehicle, she in the second, while a wounded soldier was helped into the rear Land Rover. From what Lucy could do, two dead soldiers were left behind.

It was hard to accept that people were actually dying and somehow it was her fault: they wouldn't be here if it weren't for her. That soldier really would have shot her, wouldn't he? Captain Jurgen Kruger, he said he was. He had

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to look into your eyes. For a moment, she wondered if that was the best way out for everyone, but when she saw the barrel of that gun pointing at her, courage failed her. Now, looking out the window as the field, lit by the train's dim headlights, raced past, she repeated her mantra: From the depths. She feared
she was about to go deeper than ever before.
The headlights picked out dark hedges and low stone walls along the roads. There were never any people or houses, and no signs of other vehicles.
Was there some sort of curfew in effect? From what she could gather, two groups of soldiers arrived at the convent at almost the same time from opposite directions. Captain Kruger led the group he encountered. A tall thin man with short dark hair, he had blue eyes that always seemed to be scanning around him. She didn't know what army he belonged to, or who his men were shooting at.
His black uniform does not have any insignia.
Cardinal Sinclair suspected she knew exactly who Kruger and his men were, but she had no opportunity to ask him before they were separated. If she had been kidnapped? If they knew Sinclair, then surely she was safe. But in that case, why would the captain threaten to kill her? It was impossible to figure out whether these were the good guys or the bad guys. As for what they expected of her, she was ignorant.
She was in the back of the Land Rover, wedged alongside an armed guard. Breathing against the window, she waited for the condensation to form a surface, then traced it. The Land Rover
turned sharply and his stomach dropped. When she was young, she was always nauseous, but, reaching her teenage years, she vowed not to let it bother her. If she concentrated hard enough, she could isolate the feeling of unease and pretend it existed outside of her. After that, she had been able to go on all the roller coasters
and fairground attractions that had been off limits to her. She had lost the gift now: the childhood nausea was firmly back.

"Who were you shooting?" Lucy wasn't sure her guard spoke English, but she was determined to get something from him.
The soldier looked at her but did not respond. He looked uncomfortable, as if he found her presence unwelcome, even disturbing. She had been given a large black parka jacket to keep her warm and she pulled the hood over her head.
His feet were freezing. When she left the convent, she had to run across the damp grass in her slippers. She didn't have socks. It was crazy, given the situation
she was in, but she really just wished her feet were warm.
I have to distract myself, she thought - to avoid thinking about dead soldiers and where the living soldiers have taken her. His mind went back
to Rafael's Mural. As soon as he saw it, he thought it might be proof that she had been chasing him for years. Experts had scoffed at her interpretation of seeking the Holy Grail. 'Embarrassing,' they said, 'without any credible proof. "This mural could change everything.

Her fingers reached for the zipper of his jacket and she began to pull it up and down. Why not see these critics? It was so obvious that the search for the Holy Grail was a search for a God very different from the one worshiped by Christians. Now, with Raphael's masterpiece, she had proof that her theory was wrong and the Catholic Church had no

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problems with the Arthurian romances, or that something was happening that could shake Catholicism to its foundations. But if the mural were perfectly orthodox, why was it locked in a secret vault in the tomb of one of the most controversial of all popes? There was a much more likely explanation. An insider once took over the Catholic Church: Pope Julius II was a heretic.

22

Ernon was still trying to take it in. First the flash - the blinding light - followed by the booming boom, then the silence. Everything on the TV image was obscured by smoke. The frame began to break.
BBC presenter studio reappeared. "I'm sorry, we have, uh, lost sound and sight of Washington. I... as you saw, there was an explosion... we are trying to reconnect to our reporter on the scene. We... President Adams has not... We haven't received any confirmation... the bomb was hidden inside the Ark, it seems.

"Jesus Christ, Adams is dead. Harrington, pale, stood up. 'It was a trap all along.'

"I told him, 'Vernon blurted out. "The whole thing was a set-up. Adams couldn't resist playing the Savior. The easiest fucking target imaginable.
He looked at Gresnick then felt guilty.
The North American had a film of tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry," Vernon said.
'That was insensitive.
'I don't give a fuck what you thought of him,' Gresnick snapped. 'He was my commander in chief.'

"First the Pope, now the President," Harrington said calmly. "Who is next?"

'The vice president is an old man with a bad heart,' Gresnick muttered.
"He won't last long." He slammed his fist on the table. 'Curse'.
"What about the Ark?" Vernon spoke softly to avoid aggravating Gresnick. "Do you think they blew up the real thing or a fake?
"We'll have to wait for forensic reports from the FBI," Harrington replied.
Gresnick and Harrington surprise Vernon. They wanted so much to believe that the Ark was real, to believe that God himself would appear on his throne above the Ark and announce that the world had been saved.
'I need to clear my head,' Gresnick said, looking like he was about to throw up.

"I'm sorry, Colonel," said Harrington. "It must have been a nightmare to see your President die like that. I can't say I liked the man, but...
"This ends now.
"It'll take us an hour and a half time." Harrington picked up the green sphere. "I'm going to, uh, take this to the lab."

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Vernon looked at the phone in his private office, wondering if he should contact

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his wife, but it probably wouldn't be a working connection to Sweden. Plus, he would probably hear his baby gurgling in the background and he couldn't deal with it. Deep down, he was convinced that he would never see little Louise again. Anyway, what would he say to his wife? The right words, all the words, have long since dried up.

Caldwell had given him the latest report on the situation. Each passing hour brought more grim news. Seismologists around the world were saying their equipment was going wrong. The governor of California ordered the evacuation of San Francisco after being informed the San Andreas Fault could catastrophic rupture at any time.

An unprecedented number of Category-5 hurricanes were forming on the east coast of America, from Boston to Key West. Twelve had been counted so far. Each of them released in one day the same energy as a million Nagasaki atomic bombs. One expert said that if all hurricanes merged into one superhurricane they would annihilate everything in their path.

Vernon still couldn't believe that Lucy had any role in what was happening.
What would he do if he met her again? Those old feelings, they would overwhelm him, wouldn't they? He feared that the last images in his mind, the last feelings in his heart, might not be for his family, but for the woman who rejected him. How many had suffered the same fate, thinking about the wrong person in the end?

Someone was hammering on his door: Gresnick. The colonel tried to speak, but could not get his words out.

Vernon smelled whiskey on the American's breath. "Is everything okay, Colonel?
Come in and sit down.

"I don't want a damn place," Gresnick snapped. "Both prisoners have disappeared. The green ball has gone from laboratory too. What kind of ship are you running?"

'What are you talking?'
'Are you hard of hearing, sir? The prisoners disappeared. "He waved his hand. 'In the air.'

Ernon, still bristling at Gresnick's outburst, checked the surveillance tapes for the third time. Engineers had confirmed that there was no defect. He sat in the guardhouse studying the images on two monitors, one showing Sergeant Morson's cell phone footage and the other Captain Ferris's footage. He froze both tapes at the same frame. It was impossible to concentrate with the alarm going off. The hallways were full of people running around, pistols in hand. All exits were sealed. Somehow, he knew it wouldn't make any difference.

He examined Ferris's tape. The captain was alternately still lying on his bed, with the sheets pulled over his head, or writhing underneath. The strange thing was that he had stopped making any sound. On Morson's tape, the sergeant looked directly at Ferris through the special glass wall that separates their adjacent cells. Far from showing any concern, he was smiling.

Vernon moved both tapes forward, frame by frame. He studied the Ferris strip in

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particular. At one point, everything was normal, then a point of intense light appeared under the sheets just where Ferris's head was. In Morson's tape, the sergeant was standing at that moment. In the background, one of the soldiers shouted something and began to raise the Heckler & Koch automatic pistol.

Cursed Vernon. Just when he needed to see exactly what was happening, the tape showed

nothing but a blinding light, so bright that he had to turn the monitor's brightness down to minimum. At the same time,

the sound cut off.

Apparently the same thing happened to the CCTV footage in the archive section just before it was destroyed. He was sure it was a technical problem, but now he had been assured the equipment was in perfect working order. That meant... what did that mean? All I knew for sure was

what

no prisoners could be found. His guards were dead that there was not a mark on their bodies. It looked like they had suffered heart attacks. Whatever it was they saw, it left their faces disfigured with - just one word equipped - terror, the same terror previously visible on the dead archivist's face. The two incidents had to be related, but how? The prisoners were undoubtedly in their cells during the attack on the archive.

The bars of Ferris' cell were not damaged. As for Morson's, it appeared that the door-lock had melted, allowing the door to open. There were no signs that the prisoners had left the building, and none that they were still inside. So where to? A digital keyboard was used to open and close cell doors. Morson's cell phone keyboard was destroyed, but Ferris's was intact.

Vernon checked the logs to see if anyone had opened the door since 6:00 pm when Dr. Wells last inspected the prisoner. There was no unauthorized access. In fact, no access of any kind.

Maybe I missed something. Vernon rewinds the tapes to the moment of the attack on the archive. He assumed that because the two prisoners were in their cells after the attack that they must have been there during the attack.

Nothing strange happened on a Sergeant Morson tape, but Captain Ferris was a different matter. Just before the attack on the archive, a wisp of what looked like black smoke emanated from under the sheets where Ferris lay. It was visible only for a moment, then disappeared. It either dispersed or moved away exceptionally quickly, too quickly to be caught on video. He couldn't make any sense.

“They're gone, aren't they?” said a voice.

Vernon turned to see who had entered the guardhouse. Hugh Wells was there, his face chalk white.

"I'm just checking the tapes," Vernon said.

'You won't find anything. Wells grabbed a piece of paper. "These things cannot be true. They are myths, legends, primitive superstitions.

'What do you have there, Hugh?' It looked like something had Wells printed from the Internet. Vernon took it then started swallowing hard, almost not believing what he was reading.

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And after some days my son Methuselah took a wife for his son Lamech, and she became pregnant with him and bore him a son. And her baby was white as snow and red as a rose, the hair on her head white as wool and her long curly hair beautiful, and to her eyes, when she opened them the whole house shone like the sun... And his father Lamech was afraid of him and fled and went to Methuselah his father and said to him, 'I have begotten a strange son. He is not like a human being, but he looks like the children of the angels in heaven to me, his form is different, and he is not like us... It does not seem to me that he is of me, but of the angels. ..

The Book of Noah

'What is this?' Vernon had never heard of the book of Noah. On a guess, he thought it might be one of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament.
"There is so much we are ignorant of," Wells said. "The Book of Noah was one of the most sacred texts ever written. It described Noah's life before and after the Flood. The original was lost and only fragments have survived, such as this extract .

"You can't be taking this seriously, Hugh. It's bullshit.
"That prisoner should have died," Wells replied. "No one could have resisted the changes that happen to your body." His hands were shaking.
'There is another part to that quote from the Book of Noah. He ends by saying that "angels" might be the wrong word. It must be ... "" Let me guess ".
Vernon closed his eyes. 'Demons'.

t couldn't happen, but it hadn't: two prisoners gone without a trace. Worse still, it looked like one of them wasn't exactly human anymore. It was a relief when Commander Harrington gave Vernon something else to focus on. Hunched over the computer in his office, he was already trying to put together a PowerPoint presentation. In half an hour, he, Harrington and Gresnick would have to take their preliminary conclusions about the two prisoners and their possible connection to world events to the Director General. With no answers, prisoners no longer in custody, Dr. Wells possibly having a breakdown, an ex-girlfriend in an insane asylum, and with no end of fantastic speculation, Vernon feared he would be fired on the spot.

Where to start? Not with the angel, that was for sure. Dr. Wells was speculating that perhaps there had always been some human beings, unlike any others, capable of supernatural feats. Vernon thought his friend was losing, but there was no denying something spectacularly strange was happening. As for Lucy, every time Vernon thought of her, he felt nauseous.

He looked at the computer screen. The bullet points he put in his presentation were mocking him. Once again, he tried to fit the facts together into some coherent hypothesis. Facts? Christ.

Fact 1. The world's time had turned apocalyptic; Animals everywhere were scared. Global disasters were happening on an unprecedented scale.
Fact 2. The American Special Forces unit had defected and invaded sacred sites linked with three of the Western world's most famous religious artifacts.

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Fact 3. The Ark of the Covenant, true or false, had found its way to the White House, where it was used to hide a bomb that killed the president.
Nobody took responsibility. No demands were made, no explanations offered.

Fact 4. The Delta Force defectors were all grandchildren of US intelligence officers who interrogated senior Nazi officials at the end of World War II. These Nazis had specific responsibility for looted religious treasures. Half of the intelligence officers then died under mysterious circumstances, perhaps murdered by their own colleagues.

Fact 5. The top-secret document The Destiny Cainite was stolen from the MI5 archive, but Colonel Gresnick had a copy of his grandfather's original translation. The document said that Hitler had a peculiar fascination for the Spear of Destiny and spoke of a ten-thousand-year-old mission somehow revolving around the Spear.

Fact 6. Two members of the Delta Force unit had been apprehended. They broke into the British Library and were caught looking at microfiches of ancient documents about the Holy Grail. They had returned from a surveillance mission in southwest England, and their target was someone very familiar.

Screw this. Vernon still couldn't accept that Lucy was part of all this, however, one of the inmates had actually described her as the most special person in the world. He thought himself at the same time, of course. Maybe he still did, but that was because of love. Sergeant Morson didn't love Lucy, so why does he think she was so significant?

Fact 7. Fact 7. Fact 7. Vernon groaned. It was nonsense, no kind of truth at all. A prisoner turned into an angel then disappeared with his colleague after breaking into high security cells and killing several guards without leaving a mark on their bodies. The angel also apparently attacked the MI5 archive and stole The Cainite Destiny. It takes occultists, not MI5 folks, to make any sense of it all.

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Vernon had been in the general manager of coverage's office only once before. He had never forgotten how spectacular the view of the River Thames was from up here. Located in the upper corner of the building, the apartment had a large balcony with fluted Greek columns, and commanded a privileged location, close to the Houses of Parliament.
While the DG read his report, Vernon opened the balcony doors and walked out. From up here, on a clear day, Thames shone like a vein of silver. Last summer he was in this same spot and was amazed at how beautiful London was. Several of Vernon's friends fantasized about having sex in their offices: if that was his game too, he would have chosen to have sex here. But all he could see now was the strange darkness that had gripped London for the last three days, barely penetrated by the streetlights that were now switched on 24/7. Even during the day, with the sickly red sky, everything was dark. Sometimes Vernon asked if it was psychological - a manifestation of the spiritual malaise that had afflicted them all.

The newspapers he had seen in the last couple of days used expressions like 'peculiar fog', 'impenetrable fog', 'smoke fog.' Every few hours,

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Fierce storms broke out, but there was never thunder, and no rain, at least not over London. On the other hand, in the north of the country, there was nothing but rain. Floods were reported in dozens of locations.

Hail in Scotland passed for hours rather than minutes, with ice pellets the size of tennis balls that crippled anyone caught in the open.

Not long ago, London had enjoyed a mini heat wave. The sun blazed every day, a huge yellow disk in a perfect blue sky. Now Vernon barely remembered what it looked like. The only thing left in its place cast nothing but that strange, unsettling, rust-colored light. London, full of energy days before, was old and worn now, like a sepia photograph of a scene from long ago.

He breathed in the strange air. It seemed to smell different now, have a different texture. Looking out over the River Thames, he wondered if the thing was out there somewhere - a black angel, circling in the darkness, the noise of its wings hidden by the birds' incessant squawking.

He returned to the main room and sat down in front of General Director Eva Barnes. A small, strong woman with short gray hair, she clearly stood apart; she never showed any signs of feeling threatened by the select group of ambitious managers, all male, who reported directly to her. Commander Harrington was one of them. He made it clear more than once that he didn't like Barnes, but he respected him. As for Colonel Gresnick, he sat calmly on a sofa, with a folder in his hand.

Vernon Barnes asked what he thought about his presentation. The round rings of her eyes showed that she was sleeping as poorly as everyone else. No doubt the Prime Minister was constantly calling her. Vernon was glad he didn't era

in Barnes' position of having to answer the PM's questions, having to admit that there were no leads. It was difficult to even define the problem. Was it a matter of intelligence or something for scientists? For priests?

According to the latest reports, fuel shortages were common across Britain. Emergency reserves had dwindled rapidly. Power cuts began in central England, and were likely to become longer and more frequent. The rest of the country

would not be far behind.

In the United States, CNN reported that the new president had ordered key White House personnel to move to an underground bunker beneath the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Do they know something that everyone else doesn't?

But no one could hide the news about volcanoes from the world. Dense black choking clouds were expelling from all of them. With one volcano explosion releasing the same energy as five hundred atomic bombs, if they all erupted at the same time what would the simultaneous detonation of 800,000 A-bombs be like? If that happened, all the smoke and dust in the sky would block out the sun and bring about a permanent winter, a new, irreversible ice age. At least, the explosion was likely to destabilize all major fault lines throughout the world, triggering earthquakes.

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Was there any way out? Newspapers, now reduced to little more than one sheet,
were still speculating about the theft of three world-famous religious artifacts and promoting the claims of religious leaders that God was showing His righteous wrath. Could there really be a connection between stolen relics and natural disasters? On the one hand, it was absurd, but with the world's scientists fighting
among themselves, superstition had filled the vacuum. The assassination of the American president, with its religious implications, had only served to massively increase the frenzy.

On BBC News 24, bulletins reported that COBRA meetings were taking place on an ongoing basis, with the Prime Minister presiding over most of them

personally. What everyone knew about COBRA was that it was activated only in times of national emergency.

COBRA always fascinated Vernon. The acronym was much more interesting than what it stood for: Cabinet Office Briefing Room A. COBRA held its meetings at an
undisclosed location in Whitehall, although everyone MI5 knew it was a secure suite of offices in the Cabinet building itself, next door of Downing Street. It had everything an advanced communications center
needed - banks of computers, fiber optic cabling,
fax machines, telephone lines, video conferencing equipment, its own generators. Everything was state of the art, with all communications encrypted. All so that the Prime Minister, ministers and key government
officials could obtain information about critical incidents and have reliable, secure lines of communication with the police, fire brigade, army, hospitals and all branches of government.

No one involved with COBRA would be impressed if Barnes were required to explain what MI5 thought might be going on. It would be embarrassing to admit the nature of
what they were thinking. But with TV images coming in from around the world, showing people arriving at places of worship, it might be difficult not to get caught up in the religious hysteria.

"We have no other lines of investigation," Barnes said. "The contents of the report are bizarre, Mr. Vernon, but we have nothing else. From a political point of view, we have to be
seen to be doing something. I'll tell you
O
PM we are chasing leads on the stolen religious artifacts. If we recover them, we will be able to demonstrate that they have no connection to natural disasters. You and Colonel Gresnick
will be provided with all the resources you need. "

To achieve what? Vernon asked. He has no idea what to do with the information he already has.

"I'm not going to comment on some of the observations about escaped prisoners," Barnes said. "I want them recaptured as soon as possible, and a detailed explanation of how they got out in the
first place. Commander Harrington can handle that."

She placed her hands on the table, as if trying to find something solid to hang on. Vernon
knew how she felt. Everything was in ruins, all certainty disappearing.

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'I want you to know,' Barnes said, 'that I have been in contact with the heads of every major intelligence service in the world. None of them are better than us. Most are saying that global warming is responsible for everything that is happening, and they are focusing their efforts on helping
the scientific community.

Vernon looked at Gresnick. Before the American arrived, he would have agreed to this. Now, after everything Gresnick had revealed, perhaps there was a chance something else
was at the root of this.

"There's a helicopter waiting for you on the roof-pad," Barnes said. “Where are you sending us?” Vernon grimaced, hating the idea of venturing outside. “Anyway, nothing
can fly. The birds out there - a helicopter could never get past them.

'The Chinook was equipped with a device that emits an ultrasound frequency. I'm sure it drives the birds crazy and clears them out of the way, at least temporarily. I believe Mr. Gresnick's flight to England
used the same technology.

"We haven't had any problems at all," Gresnick said.
Vernon wasn't convinced. He thought that birds were not likely to be frightened by any apparatus.

"An SAS unit was mobilized to accompany him," Barnes added.
'Commander Harrington will stay here to coordinate things on this end.' ‘Where are we going?’ Vernon repeated.

"Your mission is to find your ex-girlfriend.

Vernon tried to hide his surprise. So it was really going to happen. Everything you feared most was about to happen - you attracted it in some crazy way.

"Are we going to Glastonbury?" He hated that place. It was a New Age circus, filled with every religious fanatic imaginable. They had more religions than people.

"Yes and no," said Barnes. 'You'll be taking the trail there.' Trail?
"We received a report half an hour ago that gunfire had broken out at the asylum where
Lucy Galahan was being held. Four soldiers are dead. The police scanned their fingerprints and ran them through our Special Forces personnel database. We had now positive IDs. Two belonged to Delta Force deserters. The other two...

"Do the deserters have Lucy?
"She's with the others," Barnes replied. From others? '
"I was about to tell you that the other two dead men have also been identified. They are Swiss
guards.
Vernon shook his head. 'You mean the people who guard the Pope? "

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ucy looked out the window and tried to see what was going on. The convoy had stopped five minutes earlier, with Captain Kruger and a female colleague in the lead vehicle
getting out, their torches cutting through the

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darkness. What were they doing? Kruger, holding a pair of night vision binoculars by the looks of it, climbed a rocky hill overlooking the road. His colleague was busy studying a map, his face illuminated by torches. Lucy

asked if they were checking to see if they were being followed, looking for the best way to avoid pursuit.
She turned to the soldier sitting next to her. He hadn't said a word during the trip. Every time his long legs threatened to brush against hers, he pulled them away. Did he
think she had something contagious? Every now and then she caught him looking at her, the same way people looking at modern art demonstrates that they don't understand.

“Can I get some fresh air?” she asked.
"I'll give you a few minutes to stretch your legs. His English was impeccable, tinged with just the slightest foreign accent. He twisted round, leaned
toward the back of the vehicle and picked up something. "We have a spare uniform for you.
Lucy took off her coat and put on her black uniform over her pajamas. The soldier handed him a pair of army boots and socks. The boots were a little big, but she tied the laces tight, and the thick socks helped.
Before she opened the door, she put her coat back on and closed it to the top until only her eyes were exposed. As she was about to get out of the car, the soldier
hit her on the arm.
"Wait," he said. "You're going to need this." He handed her a black rubber torch. Once again, she reached for the handle to open the door.
The soldier hit the automatic pistol. "I'm seeing."
Lucy took a few steps away from the Land Rover. Did the soldier really think she was going to try to escape? It was pitch black beyond the lights of car headlights and a few torches, and the temperature was below freezing. She had no idea where she was, and she was sure to die of exposure if she stumbled outside in the dark.
At the convent, she had begun to think of the outside world as a forbidden zone: it would kill her if she ever went outside. Yet there she was. Still alive, actually feeling quite strong. She knew it wouldn't last.
Shining her torch around her, she discovered that the convoy had stopped beside a picturesque stone bridge over a stream. She knew this place. It was called
Guinevere's Sigh, because this was supposedly where Queen Guinevere realized that her love for Lancelot was too strong to fight. James Vernon brought you here once, eager to show you a fine, stone water canopy with a bearing of wood carved angels
at its corners. Legend said this was the wishing well, where Guinevere made her fateful choice to sleep with Lancelot, sealing fate in Camelot. After their illicit affair, Camelot was plunged into civil war and ultimate collapse, taking all dreams of a golden world with it.

Lucy shivered as she shone her torch into the well, but it wasn't the cold that made her shiver. This was where she came the night she decided
to end her relationship with James. Was it perverse to have come here of all places to make this decision? Did she need to communicate with the ghost of her former self before she could go through with this?

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James made no secret of what he wanted when he flipped the coin for good the first time.

"I wish we'll get married before the end of the year," he said happily.
She didn't say yes to him. She didn't say anything. She closed her eyes and tried to wish herself too.
But nothing came. There are no desires, no dreams. What she wanted was
for things to stay exactly as they were. She told James that she was scared and couldn't give him an answer right now. However,
he really was the ideal boyfriend. He had a job at MI5 that he never talked about, but liked. It made her feel safe, and
she knew that any secret could be safely entrusted to him. They had received it so well. It amazed her how lovingly
he looked at her, as if she were a rare beauty. He once said he wasn't sure if she was his idol or ideal. At first it scared him - how could
she live up to his expectations? But, whatever she did, James was never disappointed in her, even when she disappointed herself.

He didn't complain when she made him join her diving, and he said he loved hearing her theories about the Arthurian legends. He seemed to say that. When her book was rubbished, he quoted Jonathan Swift to console her: "When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that all the dunces are in confederation against him." She loved him for it.

It was the day after his trip to Guinevere's Sigh that the call came. Her father had sounded like an automaton.
"Your mother has breast cancer," he said. "It's
aggressive. Stage four. She's less than six months old.
That was it. His father hung up the phone. From that moment on, she began to unravel.
I had friends who were in the same position. They had been disturbed, of
course, but somehow it was all superficial. They brushed it off like dust. They had a funeral and
got on with their lives, and people said how brave they were and how their parents would be so proud that they had kept the show on the road.

"The last thing your parents would want would be for you to be miserable," they would say. Don't these people feel? How can you move forward when the people you made are no longer there?
The sun was stolen from the sky. The heat went away.
Nothing can continue, nothing.
'Lucy, can I have a word?' Cardinal Sinclair approached him carrying the Land
Rover. Several soldiers came to see him. One shone his flashlight in his face, forcing him to raise his hand to block the beam.
The night had a strange thickness, as if it were made of cloth. Lucy wondered how long the nights had been like this. Her convent cell had no windows. She saw the outside only when she entered the convent garden for her daily exercise. Not long ago, she hadn't even
managed much, and had to be pushed in a wheelchair. Then lately, just as she had begun to feel stronger, she had stopped anyone from going out at all, and given no reason - now she knew why.

Watching Sinclair approaching, Lucy still wasn't sure if she trusted him. She was convinced she was a prisoner, but what about him?

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'What do you want? " Her tone was much sharper than she intended. "I hope you'll explain what's going on."

She wondered if he was in the same mold as grand inquisitors like Torquemada. They don't have the chance to torture anyone nowadays, but perhaps in their hearts there was still there, that desire to make everything clean, to wipe out all dissenters, to incinerate all impurity.

"I assure you," he said, "I expected nothing of this. 'You know who these men are, don't you?'

'They are Swiss guards from Rome.
'Swiss Guard? "Lucy was taken by surprise. "I thought your job was to protect the Pope." Another question occurred to her, but she didn't say it: if they were from the Vatican, why didn't
Sinclair know they were coming? But he seemed to anticipate his concern.

'Kruger said they were a special unit, reporting only to the Pope," he said.
"Nobody in the Vatican knows about them. They were formed a year ago
and I have been training with the French Foreign Legion ever since.
Lucy groaned inwardly. The Vatican's secret military unit? This was getting worse.
"But didn't you say the pope was dead?"
'That's the thing.' Sinclair lowered his voice. 'The captain said the Pope
ordered them to carry out this mission no matter what. Even though he died, they were to continue. '

"I don't understand, Cardinal. Why doesn't the Pope talk about Kruger's team?

Sinclair looked away.
Lucy had almost forgotten how to interpret body language like that. At the convent, no one hid things.
Sinclair felt painfully rusty. Why was he so uncomfortable talking about the dead Pope? Another thing
that bothered her. Why did these Swiss Guards show up now, when things were so dire? Why didn't they come weeks ago?

“Are we prisoners?” she asked.
"No, but we can't come and go as we please. We have to do everything Captain Kruger says.

"So, we're stuck." "They are protecting us."
"Whereby?"
'Lucy, other soldiers are chasing us. Kruger knows who they are. "Lucy looked at Sinclair then started to turn away. She hated it.
'American Special Forces, Lucy, that's the one after us. Kruger thinks they are just a few kilometers behind.

'What?' Lucy hadn't formed any idea what might want to harm her, but the Americans were at the bottom of the list.
“Deserters,” said Sinclair.

Defectors? Does this make it easier to understand? If they had abandoned her just so they could come to England to kill her?
'Get back to the vehicles," Kruger shouted, heading down the hill. "We're going."
‘Where are they taking us?’ Lucy asked Sinclair.
The cardinal shook his head. 'Kruger wouldn't say. "His breath condensed in the freezing air.

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"I didn't tell you the code name for the Kruger mission.

Lucy saw Kruger climb back into his Land Rover. She felt he was one of those men who didn't give up. Once he had his orders, he continued tirelessly until they were carried out. The Pope chose it for himself precisely for that reason, didn't he?

She closed her eyes and lay there for a moment. The wind was seeded with tiny particles of ice, biting into his flesh. A word came into his mind, just as it had around the convent. She knew it was the same word Cardinal Sinclair was about to use. She had no idea why she was so sure, and it scared her.

"I already know," she said, opening her eyes. "Your mission is codenamed Armageddon.

26

he helipad on the roof of Thames House was a recent innovation, just three months old. To make room for the helicopters, the building contractors had no choice but to vandalize the beautiful gold-colored sloping roof. The whole aesthetic look of Thames House was destroyed in one fell swoop, Vernon thought. Everyone loved the convenience, but then they were all interested flyers.

He stood outside the small air control office, clapping his hands to keep warm. Although he was in a warm uniform - he managed to borrow spare kit from one of the soldiers in the basement - he had no gloves. It was 1:00 in the morning. The most sensitive men were at home with their wives and children, instead of getting ready to go out into this darkness, the kind of darkness that made you think you weren't coming back.
As for his own wife and baby, Vernon was convinced he couldn't be in a safer place. The sparsely populated island near Stockholm, with plenty of food and water, was as good as it got. Furthermore, there were other ghosts haunting him. Or just one. All of his emotional energy now revolved around Lucy. She had discarded him, so it was perverse to still be holding a torch for her, but you have no control over that sort of thing, do you? This type of torch is sure to burn you one day. Unless the miraculous moment comes when you realize you've stopped loving. But what's so great about it?

The Chinook, painted in camouflage colors, looked new. It has two tempered fiberglass rotor blades, one at the front and one at the rear. The SAS - Britain's elite Special Forces unit - is used in its missions because of its reputation for toughness. Its fuselage was waterproof, so it could make amphibious landings. Vernon prayed it wouldn't come to that. The last thing he wanted was to go swimming in the dark. The two M60 machine guns were more to his liking. He suspected they could see a lot of use.

He was also worried about noise: last time he was in a helicopter, he couldn't hear a thing over the sound of the rotor blades and engine. For the next day's set, it was partially deaf. NASA apparently recently helped helicopter manufacturers to make the cabins much quieter environments where you can actually hold a civil conversation, but Vernon was left to be convinced.

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One by one, SAS soldiers entered the Chinook. Vernon was surprised by how short they were, not one taller than about 5'6''. They were tough, muscular little men, especially with shaved heads. Four of them had broken with convention and sported long, shaggy hair and almost comical drooping mustaches.

As he listened to their conversations, he realized that almost all of them were Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish. There were only two English: the Geordie and Scouser.

The soldiers wore camouflage uniforms and helmets, bulky packs on their backs, and black gloves. If anyone looked like they were going to war, they did. Armed with Colt Commando rifles, Heckler & Koch MP5K machine guns and Browning High Power pistols, they were bristling with weaponry.

Vernon made a point of shaking hands with the unit leader, Captain Kerr, a husky Glaswegian. The captain deliberately used one of those ridiculously sexist grips, designed to show who was boss. Vernon hurriedly pulled his hand away.

He was the last to board the helicopter. On vacation in San Francisco three years ago, he and Lucy took a sightseeing tour in a small helicopter. It was the scariest trip of his life.

When the helicopter flew under the Golden Gate Bridge, he thought he was going to lose control of his bowels, but Lucy just laughed the entire time. She once told him that she suffered from motion sickness. Not anymore, it seemed. It scared him how cheerful she was, almost as if she was enjoying overcoming her natural limitations. When she chose, she could be extremely determined. More than once, he decided that he was the most stubborn person I had ever met. Mostly, he admired it for that. At other times...

Looking up at the sky as he climbed inside, he was convinced that the birds would be an insurmountable problem. Thousands of them were wheeling above Thames House, making that endless screeching noise. She drove him crazy.

He had heard reports that, for some inexplicable reason, birds

they were flocking just over the cities and entire stretches of the country were now entirely devoid of bird life.

He sat next to Colonel Gresnick, just behind the cockpit, and wedged in. Several SAS soldiers joined him on the same side of the Chinook, while the others sat opposite, about ten men on each side.

"What does the Vatican say about the Swiss Guards? Vernon asked Gresnick as the Chinook prepared for takeoff.

"They said the matter was a religious one and they didn't want to involve secular authorities," Gresnick said, casually flipping through a file of intelligence reports. "When Commander Harrington pointed out that they were kidnapping a British citizen they told him not to interfere in matters that were God's concern.

Vernon couldn't help but grunt with amusement. "I wish I could use a line like that to get people around me." He looked at the SAS men as they smeared his face with black paint. "Does the Vatican say anything about

Delta Force defectors?

"The Vatican said, and I quote, "Defectors are working for Satan. "'I heard that

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he pays better," Vernon muttered, looking at Gresnick in
his fashionable sheepskin flying jacket and fur hat. Who does he think he is, he
thought - some fighter pilot?
He gripped the arms of his chair as the helicopter's rotor blades whirred into action, and
prayed that the pilot would have time to abort the flight if
the birds didn't clear out of the way. Seconds later, the Chinook went airborne.
As he rose quickly, Vernon heard the sound of birds screaming, but the rotor blades
drowned it all out. Seconds later, something broke into
the cockpit. Vernon's heart jumped.
"Just a bum," the pilot said over the intercom. "The flight path is clear." Within seconds,
they were racing over the deserted streets of London.
Vernon looked at Gresnick and blew hard. He had been doubtful this
mission was ever going to happen. Now, he could no longer help but think about the
objective of the mission. It was really going to happen - he was going to see Lucy again, and
find out why she was at the center of world events.
American defectors were stealing religious artifacts, the Catholic Church was the most
powerful religious organization on Earth. Put the two facts
together And what do you get? Perhaps the Americans had stolen something of special
importance to the Catholic Church. Whatever it was, Lucy
must have expert knowledge of it. Maybe she was the world authority.
Given the book she had written, the artifact's identity seemed all too obvious - the Holy Grail.

When he mentioned his idea to Gresnick, the American nodded and smiled. "Could it be."
Gresnick had one of those dazzling Hollywood smiles, with the
kind of perfect teeth that seemed impossible for an Englishman. Vernon hated smiles
like that. He didn't exactly have bad teeth, but neither did he.

He has a smile worth mentioning. It wouldn't be seducing women, that was for sure.
But Lucy had a beautiful smile. He asked how she got it.
"Our number one priority is to find her," Gresnick said. "So let's learn one way or another
why she's making so much noise."
As the Chinook cleared London, Vernon felt nausea kick in, but he didn't want to
show signs of weakness in front of others. Another thing that was contributing to his feeling
of discomfort. He hated the idea, didn't want it to
be true, but every time he thought of Lucy, he found himself replaying the old emotions that
he hoped had killed him. It was horrible to realize that all he had done was bury
them. Things like this couldn't be relied upon to stay buried - perhaps like the Holy Grail
itself. Does Lucy appreciate the irony?
Perhaps there was a greater irony. Lucy may be more than just
depressed or traumatized. If he left she was hopelessly insane, what then?
The deserters would have no use for her, so they might as well kill her.
Did Lucy understand what was happening to her? Surely her brain could fire one last time.
She was so impressive when she was in full flow, seeing connections where others saw
chaos, cutting through pomp and illogic. She didn't care about hurting people's
feelings when others were wrong, which was why she treated her so violently when she had
the chance to retaliate. If she refused to help the
deserters, they would threaten her, perhaps torture her. For pure

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perversity, she may not cooperate. She would
have no idea how much danger she was in. These people wouldn't stop. They were
merciless killers, veterans of many lethal missions.
And there was something particularly strange about them. Vernon
could barely believe it when Gresnick revealed this singular fact, but the American assured
him it was true. The defectors of the grandparents only wanted male children and had
given up their daughters for adoption, while the defectors of the parents had taken active
steps to ensure that they only had male children: the female embryos were aborted. They
looked like they belonged to some misogynistic cult. Women's lives, it seems, did not possess
any value to them whatever. Could it be Lucy?

27

Project Armageddon, Lucy muttered as she looked out of the Land Rover. Many people
imagined the end comes in shades of black. For her,
the world can end in only one way - a blue flood. In Orwell's Room 101, she would be at the
edge of a blue lake, being pushed into the water. Blue, and only blue, was the color of
Armageddon.
“Where are you taking me?” she asked, thinking the guard would ignore her, but the response
was immediate.
'Tingel.

At first, the name passed through Lucy as if it had never been said. She tried to pretend it
was just another name, a place on the map like any other. The Land Rover went through
some bumps and Lucy's head hit the window. Blue rushed through his mind, a tidal wave. For
a second, the wave froze and she saw thousands of people trapped inside, their bodies
sticking out at strange angles. Then it moved again, so fast it became a blur, shaking the
drowned bodies like salt and pepper. Tintagel. He had spent so long blocking it out of his
mind, convincing himself that there was no such word, no such place.

'My medication,' she said. 'I have to take my medicine.' Still the blue torrent swirled in her
mind. The Land Rover accelerated and his stomach dropped.
The soldier didn't respond and just looked out the other window. Previously, he prohibited her
from taking anything without his permission.
Lucy imagined herself as a small, remote dot in the center of a blue ocean.
Helpless, hopeless, a speck of dust in eternity. If she doesn't get the medicine, she's done. "I'm
going to
die," she screamed, grabbing the soldier's arm. The ocean in his mind turned to blood, a red
sea under a yellow sun, lapping at a white sand beach.

The soldier looked at her then pushed away. 'OK, OK, take them.'
In the blink of an eye, Lucy's hand was inside her pocket, reaching for her pill bottle. He
popped two into his mouth and swallowed, asking them to kick it
immediately. Within seconds, she was feeling that familiar drowsiness. His mind
began to drift. Yellows and oranges, not blues.

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There was a time when Tintagel didn't have the same meaning to her as it did now. So it was just an academic curiosity, another of the sites in southwest England that claimed a connection with King Arthur to turn tourists on.
Tintagel Castle, in its time, was an island fortress built above the breaking waves of the Atlantic, and linked to the mainland by a singular causeway. Some said it was Camelot itself. Other stories claimed Arthur was conceived here, or that the Wizard Merlin was born in a cave beneath the castle. Legend said that the cave was still passed by Merlin, whose voice can be heard on stormy nights. Merlin's ghost supposedly stood on the beach outside the cave entrance with baby Arthur lifted in his arms, holding him up to the moon.
Nearby, at Slaughter Bridge, Arthur may have fought his final cataclysmic battle of Camlann, the last of his brave knights dying that brutal day in the thick mud.
Lucy felt her arm being shaken and sleepily looked up. The Land Rover stopped and the door was open, letting in cold air.
Captain Kruger looked at her, his face flushed. 'Don't you understand anything? You can't take drugs anymore. You need to be alert at all times. “He tried to get into his pockets.

"Stay away from me," Lucy shouted. “I finished all the pills. I threw the bottle.” She tried to push him away, but he moved his hands aside, shaking. Grabbing her, he dragged her out of the car, lifted her off the ground and slammed her against the front door. He teased her, but found nothing. The bottle was in his pajama pocket. She almost smiled. She knew he would never touch her there. Not Captain Kruger. Not the saint, the Vatican's superhero.
"I will never help you. You are crazy."
Kruger's eyes swelled. He brought his head to hers, until their noses were almost touching.

'You can't lay a finger on me.' Lucy felt an urge to tease him. Hard Rain was shooting downwards now, driving into his face. 'You can't do anything to me.

A stinging blow exploded against her left cheek, and her body swayed involuntarily to one side, her legs giving out beneath her. Lying in the mud near the front wheel, with blood in her mouth, it took her a moment to comprehend what had happened. 'You hit me,' she muttered in disbelief.
'I don't have time for stupid games,' Kruger barked. 'We know the exact moment the world will end. Only you can stop him. '

28

Ernon was irritated when he looked at Gresnick and found the American calmly reading his files. "Doesn't it get to you?
'What is that?'
"We are flying in darkness. Aren't you worried?
The helicopter was vibrating so much that Vernon's teeth were chattering and he felt like he was inside a washing machine.
"I know the pilot," Gresnick said. "He's one of your men now, but he used to be a Night Stalker."
'What?' Vernon strained to hear over the thwup thwup of the rotor blades and powerful

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helicopter engines. So much for the new NASA noise
reduction technology. To be fair, it did make a bit of a difference. Years ago, he wouldn't have
been able to hear anything in a helicopter. Now, with an appropriately raised voice, communication was possible.
Better than being in a nightclub, that was for sure. He turned and looked Gresnick straight
ahead.

“Come on, you must have heard about night stalkers,” Gresnick said. 'Black Hawk Down and all that - elite
pilots, the helicopter equivalent of Delta Force, specializing in night operations. Some of
these guys really prefer to fly in the dark. Its navigation systems are state of the art. When they look at the LCD
monitors on their control panels, the images are so clear that it might as well be midday
in Las Vegas rather than the middle of the night in London. They can see everything that is happening
outside. "He patted

Vernon in the rear. "Plus, they have those lightweight holographic night vision goggles - stereoscopic, full depth
perception, can see in the dark. Much cooler than the cooler shades.

Vernon was unconvinced and questioningly raised his eyebrows.
"Don't worry," Gresnick said. "Even at night in bad weather this bird can do 150 mph. We'll be there in no
time.
Vernon sat up, trying to convince himself he was safe. He couldn't wait to get out of this helicopter and
feel solid ground beneath his feet again. 'That superconspiracy you were talking about back in Thames House,'
he said. 'Do you really believe there's a group out there that's been around for thousands of years?

Puppetmasters control everyone else.
'There's a super conspiracy all right, Mr. Vernon, but these aren't Puppetmasters. They are shadow people,
operating in darkness, trying to achieve their goals against
all odds. That's why they are masters of codes, and steeped in secrets. Early Christians used
all kinds of signs to recognize each other, like drawing a fish in the sand, but when they became the majority,
there was no longer a need for secret signs. Those who control the superconspiracy have never been
the majority. In fact, they have always been persecuted. But they endured, and passed their secrets down
through the generations, waiting for the day when their systems might come to fruition.

'If the Christians had the fish, what would these superconspirators use?' My grandfather was sure there was a
quick way to identify them: the Skull.

'Because?'
"Do you know where Skull and Bones originates?
'Pirates? Vernon replied, with an unsure smile. 'The Jolly Roger?
Gresnick nodded. 'Jolly Roger is a corruption of the French term jolie rouge, which means very red in
English. It was the nickname the Knights Templar gave the pavilion their fleet.
The flag was a white skull and crossbones on a blood-red background. When the Templars buried their dead
comrades, they removed the head and legs and placed them in a skull arrangement.

"Freemasonry is also full of Skull and Crossed Symbols. And the SS chose the Totenkopf,
Chief of Death - a skull on crossbones - as its

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badge on cap. My grandfather was convinced that the Cathars also used this symbol, although he only found circumstantial evidence. "
'OK, maybe they all used the Skull,' said Vernon. 'But that doesn't prove they belonged to the same conspiracy. Maybe they just like the symbol. I mean, the pirates used it too, and they're not part of their conspiracy.
'They are not?
"Come on, you can't be suggesting pirates were on her."
"Listen, the Knights Templar were officially disbanded by the papacy. After that, whoever still dared to call themselves one of the Templars was

excommunicated. It is a fact that the Templar fleet disappeared before the authorities had the opportunity to seize their ships. Templar treasure disappeared with their ships. Most people assume the treasure was loaded onto the fleet and taken to an unknown destination. Maybe Scotland, maybe Oak Island in Nova Scotia.
If they buried in a remote location, they were sure to have made a map.
Vernon could see where this was leading. "Treasure maps and Jolly Rogers – that sounds like pirates, but you're telling me it was the Knights Templar all along."
Gresnick leaned back in his chair. "The Templars were the first pirates. They were excellent sailors, and they were bandits under a death sentence if they should ever be caught. What else do you expect them to do? In time, the last of the official Templars died, but without doubt, they had children and passed on their traditions."
Vernon couldn't deny that it was a plausible theory. 'But the pirates used a black Roger Jolly and the red Templar. Why the difference?
'Pirates used two Jolly Rogers. The usual one was the black Jolly Roger, but it was the other one, the red one, that the seafarers feared most. When pirates flew the red Jolly Roger it meant No Quarter. They would slaughter everyone they encountered aboard an enemy ship. The red Jolly Roger - the Templar flag - was the most terrifying sight on the high seas. Ships belonging to Catholic powers – Spain, Portugal and France in particular – were almost exclusively targeted by pirates, as revenge for what the papacy did to the Templars.
'And do you think the skull and crossbones trembles all over the world to this day?'
"One of the most powerful secret societies in the world is based at Yale University and is made up of current and past students. Many of the alumni have gone on to be among the richest and most influential people on earth, assisted every step of the way. guiding hand of his secret society. President Adams was a member, and so is the new president. In fact, many presidents, CEOs, and directors of the FBI and CIA have been members. 'What's your name?"
"Skull and Bones".

Vernon's stomach turned as the helicopter rose sharply. The strange acoustics were driving him crazy too. He hated the combination of whirring blades, vibrating engines and shouting voices inside the passenger cabin.
"But isn't there a big problem with your theory?" he said. "I mean, that the Cathars, the Knights Templar, the Freemasons, and the Nazis are all different aspects of an ancient secret society? "'Is that a problem?"
"Well, didn't Hitler hate the Freemasons? He persecuted them. Many of them ended up in concentration camps.

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Gresnick smiled. "To a true Freemason there is nothing more embarrassing than toy town Freemasons. Ninety-nine percent of modern Freemasons have no idea what Freemasonry is about, or what true Freemasons really believe.
Most Freemasons these days just want to be part of an I'll scratch your back if you scratch my back group of social climbers. Throw in some spooky ceremonies, some exciting ancient oaths and curses, a bit of ceremonial dressing up, declarations of undying loyalty to the "brotherhood" and you have an irresistible package for shallow, greedy capitalists.

"Hitler, as a Freemason of the highest possible order, rejected them. They were a parody of the true principles of Freemasonry. No wonder he wanted to get rid of them.
"To be fair, these amateur Freemasons did serve a purpose. They were an effective weapon against the Catholic Church. Freemasons were always agitating against
priests and popes. The Catholic Church reacted by forbidding any Catholic to join the Freemasons. If they could have To achieve this, they would have
subjected the Freemasons to all the rigors of the Inquisition, but the Freemasons only came to light in Protestant countries.
"With the Inquisition consigned to history, and the Vatican just a colorful historical pageant, there is no need for ersatz Freemasons. They are a disgrace."

"How do you know all this? Vernon asked.
"I told you, my grandfather researched these things for decades and passed his work on to my parents. This is my family's life's work. We gave everything to make sense of this
conspiracy. Not just academic curiosity. We truly believe that these people
pose a threat to the world.""
But if they communicate in code all the time, how can you figure out what's going on? '

"Codes can be broken. Many times in history, members of the conspiracy were captured and tortured until they revealed their secrets. We gained great insights into how they work. One of their main techniques was to use elaborate, ambiguous metaphors.

"Like the Holy Grail?
"Exactly. That's your final metaphor, but there were many others.
'Like this?'
'Take Alchemy. The last thing alchemists looked for was something that literally turned metals into gold. They were highly religious people seeking true
knowledge of the universe, hence their obsession with dark experiences. The "base metals" they were talking about were ordinary people. "Gold" was what people became when they discovered
the true God. When they talked about an elixir of life, the Alchemists meant the promise of eternal life offered by the true God.

Likewise, when they talked about finding a cure for all human illnesses, they meant heaven where no one suffers from any illness.
'You make them sound like priests. "
"That's exactly what they were. Their predecessors were the Druids." So the alchemists were part of the superconspiracy too?

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"Every time you come across an unusual group of people attracting the hostility of the Catholic Church, you can be sure that they are part of it.'" And will they all be using metaphorical ways of speaking? "

'I think you're finding it difficult to take this one, but it's simple stuff. All you have to keep in mind is that whenever Christians are faced with a choice between a literal and a metaphorical interpretation of something, they invariably accept the literal interpretation even when it is nonsense. Especially when it's absurd.
"

"I don't understand."

"I'll give you some examples. The Johannite sect in ancient Judea refers to John the Baptist as the Word of God. So an expression like "The Word of God can be heard by all" just meant that John the Baptist was speaking out loud enough for the people at the back of the crowd to hear him. It certainly doesn't mean that God was speaking to the human race. Nor does it mean that they thought John the Baptist was God, just that he was God's chosen spokesman. He spoke for God, not as God.

"Similarly, the Johannites referred to non-Johannites as "blind" because they could not see the light of the True God. When John the Baptist converted someone, he was "causing the blind to see" i.e. introducing them to the true religion . He was not curing actual blind people of physical blindness. "Lepers" were Johannites who had fallen from the true religion, making them "untouchable" as far as practicing Johannites were concerned. "Cure a leper" meant bringing a person back to the sheepfold, which had nothing to do with the sick person being cured of leprosy.

"The "dead" were those who were excommunicated from the religion for serious crimes. To be "raised from the dead" was to be cast from excommunication. Any Johannite would have entertained the idea that this meant a man returning from actual death as ridiculous. And, think about it, if Jesus really did raise Lazarus from the dead, it would be one of the most well-known events in history, spoken for by all. Lazarus would be famous, invited to Rome to see the Emperor to describe his experience. As it was, no more Mention has already been made of Lazarus. How could a man who came back from the dead be forgotten so easily? Obviously he never died in the first place, and no one who was there at the time said he did.

'The "poor" were those who had recently joined the Joanite sect and still had much to learn, the "sick" were those who had heard the message and rejected it.
New Johannites were only allowed to drink water for the first year, after which they were allowed to drink wine. So, turning "water into wine" simply meant helping the new Johannites through their initiation period.

"Walking on water" described the final part of the initiation ceremony. Johannites threw themselves in a line in front of their religious master to prove their devotion and subservience. Barefoot, he walked over them. Christians, of course, took all this very literally, as always. Those "with ears to hear" understood the coded language perfectly; Outsiders had no idea what was being discussed. Christians, entirely on the outside, never tired of getting a spectacular defense, almost comically, wrong.

Vernon paced uneasily in his seat. He had little doubt Gresnick was right.
It was easy to think of a modern example. A teenage girl might write in her diary that her new dress was bad, her new boyfriend hot, and her group's new song

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bad favorite. Someone discovering her diary Two thousand years later can conclude that she believed her dress was possessed by evil spirits, her boyfriend had a fever, and she didn't think her favorite band's latest song was any good. It suddenly seemed crazy to Vernon that anyone could have believed that Jesus healed lepers, restored sight to the blind, turned water into wine, walked on water, raised Lazarus from the dead, and all the rest.

Vernon looked at the SAS soldiers. Most of them had closed their eyes, but they were clearly not sleeping. A Welsh couple in the corner were talking about rugby. Vernon blew hard. At least his conversation with Gresnick had taken his mind off the flight, but now he was feeling sick again.
'Lots to think about, isn't there?' Gresnick raised his voice as the weather outside began to worsen. The wind was getting stronger, heavy rain driving against the helicopter.
Vernon nodded. "With all the commotion going on at Thames House, we haven't got time to tie anything down. There are so many loose ends.
'Brain feels like jelly, right? I felt the same way when I came across all of this. Gresnick pulled the lid down until it was almost hiding his eyes. "We need to have a good idea of what's going on against us or we won't have a chance. Those Delta Force guys out there hold all the cards. They know exactly what's going on, and we're just taking shots in the dark."

It was just occurring to Vernon now how out of his depth he was. Going on active duty wasn't his thing. His job was to provide agents in the field with the information they needed. Now, he was the person needing the disk information, and there was none.
He noticed the pilot whispering to one of the crew and strained to hear what they were saying. It was difficult to make out over the sound of the engines and rotor blades, but he thought the pilot said something about a 'strange shape' appearing above the Chinook. A flock of birds, perhaps? 'Are you okay?' " Gresnick asked.
'I just thought I heard the pilot mention a problem.'
“Night Stalker, remember? If he can't handle it, no one can.” Vernon smiled half-heartedly.

"The Destiny Cainite says Nazis can trace their lineage to Cain," Gresnick said. "What do you know about Cain?
'He killed Abel. He was the first murderer in history. God marks and made him an outcast. He lived in the Land of Nod, East of Eden. I seem to remember that he was a bit of a scientist and built a city. "An early Alchemist, perhaps?

'I think so'.
"How do you think Cain felt about God?" He hated it, I think. "
"Does he want revenge?" Probably. "
'What do people who want revenge normally do?'
Vernon tried to jump forward to see where it was going. A unique childhood memory came back to him. He remembered standing outside his parents' room one night, with his ear pressed against the door. Moaning noises came from inside. No human being, he thought, could make such sounds. Behind that locked door, your parents must have transformed into their true form - aliens of some kind. He didn't talk to them

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days later.
He hesitated, not wanting to look stupid in front of Gresnick, but the words rattling around in his mind were pressing against his lips. They insisted on forcing him out. "Maybe Cain wanted..." He shook his head. This was crazy. But Gresnick was looking at him, encouraging him to finish his sentence. Vernon had never been particularly religious, but neither was he drawn to atheism. The words now in his mind seemed like the ultimate sacrilege.

"Maybe what he wanted? Gresnick said. "To fight back?
Vernon lowered his head. Beads of sweat were erupting on his forehead. His parents weren't foreigners, he discovered all those years ago, just ordinary human beings who did ordinary human things. But no normal human being could realize the extraordinary thought that had already taken over his mind and was refusing to let go.

“Go ahead,” Gresnick said. "You know exactly what this is all about."
Vernon rushed out the words, as if saying them quickly enough was to render them harmless. "I think Cain might have wanted to kill God."
Gresnick sat down.
“Precisely.

29

he train was at a stop again. They passed a village a little earlier, but there were no lights on. Maybe there would be a blackout.

Lucy watched as Captain Kruger held a conference with three of his soldiers, each taking a turn to use the night vision binoculars. It would be a miracle, she thought, if she could see anything in the darkness, even with the latest technology. There was no moon, no starlight. Even though the Land Rovers' headlights were on, the beams appeared to break into pieces and fall to the ground. It was as if the light itself were beginning to die, its brightness dimming, like everything else in this world darkening. No one would be able to follow them under these conditions. Your convoy would appear as nothing more than a faint afterimage of something that passed here long ago. These days it was difficult to separate people from specters.

Every time one of the soldiers got out of a vehicle, they had to take a torch with them. They looked like shadow figures, ghosts traveling through a half-world where things could not take full form. His flesh was strangely pale, almost blue.

Kruger turned and pointed the flashlight at Lucy. He had one of those faces that seemed incapable of smiling. God, she hated him. She reached inside her jacket and traced the outline of her medicine bottle with her fingers. His lips formed a mischievous smile. It was so easy to fool Kruger - he didn't dare touch any sexual parts of the body. She wasn't going to stop taking her medication just because he said so. Without him, she would never have survived the last few months.
Even now, the pills were the only things keeping her calm. It amazed him that everything that happened tonight hadn't made his crack. A few months ago, after anything remotely as strange as this, she would have fallen into a zombie-like state. No, nothing could

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touch her. She would be beyond caring, always the best place to be. Her psychiatrist said that she deliberately put herself in this condition, that she was running
away from life. Who in their right mind wouldn't do that? Life equaled pain. It was the only equation no one needed to learn.
"I need to go to the, uh..." She waved her hand.
His guard walked away in disgust. 'It won't go far,' he said.
As Lucy opened the door of the Land Rover, the cold wind stung her skin. She reached inside the vehicle, grabbed a plastic water bottle and stuffed it into one
of her pockets. Stumbling a few feet in the dark, she fumbled for her torch, then scanned around, looking for a private spot.
Crouching behind a broken wall on the side of the road, she turned off her flashlight so no one could see what she was doing. She was relieved that the noise of the wind was gone, drowning out the sound she was making. When she was finished, she poured some bottled water over her hands to wash them. As she zipped up her fights, she wondered if she should try to escape after all. But where would it go? She had no map, no clear idea of where she was, and that time was outside of Siberia. She closed the cap on the water bottle and stuffed it in her pocket. Whether she liked it or not, she was trapped with Kruger. She still had no clear idea of what

His plans were for her that weren't taking her to that place. Also, zilch.
For a moment, she wished she could check her appearance in the mirror. She never worried at the convent. There were practically no mirrors there anyway. Does
she recognize herself? She was told at the convent that she was getting better and better. She had a long way to go again.
Just a few weeks ago, she was being pushed into the convent garden, in a wheelchair, dribbling, understanding nothing of who
or where she was. The only reason she still knew was that she had sneakily looked at her doctor's report. Now, not only was she returning to her old self, but, in a strange way,
speeding past. It was as if there was someone inside her, much more together than ever before.
He imagined himself as a human snake,
peeling off its old skin. Was there such a thing as a recovery that left you healthier than you were before you got sick?
Sinclair called his name. For a moment, it scared her. Lucy. Somehow, that simple label made new concrete, proved that she truly existed in this world outside the convent walls.

Climbing over the little wall, she shone her Sinclair torch. "There it is," he said.
"You must not wander like this.
“What do these soldiers want with me? You have to tell me.” It was so cold that she imagined ice were growing inside her nose. She placed her left hand deep
in one of her pockets, and wished she had thick gloves.
Every few seconds, she had to shift the torch from one side to the other to keep her hands from freezing.
Sinclair scanned around. His face dipped in and out of shadows. He was wearing an oversized coat and clapping his hands to keep warm.
'Don't trust these men. "He looked at the soldiers sitting inside the Land Rovers.
'Are they going to kill me? "

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Sinclair tilted his head. In the torchlight, his features were hard and angular. His gray eyes reflected the light in a way that made him look otherworldly.
Lucy looked at the floor and saw bloodstains. The wheel of one of the Land Rovers had crushed a rabbit. His insides were hanging out and one of his eyes was mutilated.

"I don't want to tell you," said Sinclair. "The Pope... I confess I had doubts. Julius IV was ...

'You think he was a heretic, don't you?'
Sinclair looked at her. "How could you know that?"
Lucy turned to the soldiers. She wanted to be warm and comfortable inside a vehicle, just like they were, but knew this was the only chance she would get to talk to Sinclair in private.

'Pope Julius IV named himself after Julius II, didn't he? However, it was Julius II who commissioned that mural hidden in his tomb. AND

totally unorthodox. These images of Arthurian legends were unacceptable to the Catholic Church. I wrote about papal hostility to the Arthurian romances in my book ".
She rattled off the reasons. Arthur's Knights of the Round Table – military knights with religious inclinations – were an obvious echo of the Knights Templar which the
Church had banned. Arthur himself died under mysterious circumstances and legends said that he and his army were sleeping in a large cave, waiting to be resurrected and ride out to save the world from destruction. That sounded like an alternative Messiah. The legend of the Holy Grail revolved around the figure of Joseph of Arimathea, and not Saint Peter. This suggests a secret Grail church and a potential rival priesthood, taking its legitimacy from Joseph rather than Peter. This was a direct challenge to the authority of the popes. As for Merlin, the Catholic Church has undoubtedly already burned at the stake like a sorcerer. Then there was the cult of "courtly love". Young knights were supposed to declare their love to "unattainable" married women, just as Lancelot did to Guinevere. This was the same as defending adultery. Thus the papacy gave no encouragement to the legends of Arthur. None of King Arthur's art was commissioned - no paintings, no sculptures, no nothing.

Sinclair nodded. "Those are just the most obvious reasons. You're aware of the others, of course.

'What do you mean?'
'I have to confess that you were not unknown to me before I came to the convent today. I read your book last year. It was brought to my attention because it was about heresy and it is my job to know all about the latest theories about heretical ideas. Most of the things you wrote were correct.

"Well, thank you for your support." Some of Lucy's old anger took leave again. It infuriated him how his book was dismissed so easily by a bunch of old men. Sinclair's endorsement would have been invaluable.

"You know it's not the Vatican's policy to stoke controversy," Sinclair said.
"Anyway, I always knew that King Arthur's stories were rife with heresy. Julius II was posthumously viewed with suspicion because of his mural. He's not actually buried in that tomb - he's in St. Peter's Basilica - but this it doesn't change anything. The mural was paid for, it was worked on secretly and without explanation, and no senior clergy were allowed to see it. When the

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mural was discovered several years after the death of a late Pope Julius
III, no popes ever again took the name Julius. So you can imagine the consternation when the last Pope chose Julius as his papal name. 'You only need to look at the centerpiece sculpture about Julius II from the tomb to see how suspicious he was. He commissioned Michelangelo to
produce a statue of Moses. Nothing all that surprising about that, except for one thing - Moses was given horns like the Devil. Anyone can go there and see it for themselves.

We have no reason to believe it was Michelangelo's idea.
Even the name of the church containing the tomb is curious. It's called San Pietro in Vincoli - St Peter in Chains. Perhaps Julius was recognizing that Saint Peter's successors should be chained as criminals because the line of Joseph of Arimathea were the true leaders of Christianity. "

Now Lucy understood why there was so much tension between the cardinal and Kruger. One of them was the late Pope's loyal supporter, while the other suspected
him of being a heretic. They didn't trust each other, and she, in her turn, saw no reason to trust any of them. Ernest Hemingway once said that the best way to find out if you can trust someone was to trust them.

It
was also the best way to get herself into a lot of trouble, she thought.
'How did Julius IV die? " she asked.
"His aide handed him a note moments after he had concluded a speech to the world from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica. He collapsed on the spot. Within minutes, he was pronounced dead. A massive
heart attack, apparently. "" What does the note say? '

"No one understood. 'Well, what?
"The exact words were: None of us'." Who wasn't?
"Nobody knew."
“Who sent you this? They must know that much, for sure.
'The aide said the Pope had asked to be notified immediately if an anonymous message arrived from Israel. This was an issue the Pope believed was extremely important. The advisor did not
disclose further details.
We think a Mossad agent sent the message, but Mossad later denied they knew anything about it. "

'But why would the advisor give the Pope the note at a time like this?'
The cardinal shrugged. "As I said, the Pope wanted to hear it immediately." "Why does the Pope have any contacts with Mossad?
"The whole thing was weird. I don't think we'll ever find out the truth now.
Lucy's guard knocked on the window of the Land Rover and gestured for her to get back in. When Lucy didn't move, the soldier exited the vehicle.
Sinclair took Lucy by the hand and pulled her towards him. She pulled back, hating the hard grip. His breath was all his own.
'Listen to me, Lucy,' he whispered as the soldier approached. 'I didn't want to tell you this, but I
can't lie. If it looks like you're about to be captured by the deserters, Kruger has orders to kill you. ".

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An't stand the sound. Vernon pressed his hands to his ears to silence the noise. For ten minutes, hail had pounded against the helicopter's fuselage like machine
gun fire. The pilot climbed steeply to get over time, but it had not worked. It amazed Vernon that the hailstones

were not crushing through the cockpit windshield. How could the pilot fly through that? The Chinook continued diving downward into air pockets. Vernon scanned around for something to throw up on. The wind was gaining strength, howling. He was afraid one of the rotor blades would shear out, sending the helicopter into a death spin.

He looked at Colonel Gresnick. That bastard is inhuman, he thought. The colonel was calmly reading his reports, acting as if this was a routine flight.
How could the American be so relaxed after they argued before?
Vernon repeatedly clenched and unclenched his hands, trying to channel his nervous tension into a single action. The helicopter was vibrating just as he imagined it was in
a tin can suspended in a wind tunnel. Everything that wasn't securely locked shook and shook, threatening to fly loose.
Normally, the thought that the helicopter might fall from the sky would have absorbed all of his concentration, but now his mind flitted back to Gresnick's theory.

Even if the biblical Cain actually existed and had the most murderous hatred of God imaginable, he certainly didn't think he could kill his Creator. It was impossible by definition. God is immortal, immortal, the first and the last. How do you even start planning your murder? There was no starting point, because there was no possibility of an end.

Lucy, in her book, had not mentioned anything so absurd as a cabal of fanatics conspiring to murder God, but what she did say was that some religious believers - the Gnostics - had a very strange idea of who the Creator of the Earth was. According to them, he was not the benevolent, loving God everyone imagined, but a monster: the Devil, in fact. The Gnostics maintained that the earth, as the Devil's most beautiful creation, was an abomination, a prison for souls. The most extreme Gnostics believed that the Last Judgment had already occurred and this planet was where the damned were sent. Earth was literally hell.

Sometimes, when he saw how vile people were, Vernon thought the Gnostics had an affair. Looking to his right, he noticed an SAS soldier in the far corner reading a book. He squinted his
eyes to see what it was. When he recognized him, he suppressed an instinctive chuckle. He had
never imagined that an SAS soldier would read the Bible, but why not? Perhaps the SAS were more in need of divine confirmation than anyone else. He had no doubt that the soldier's chapter studied so intensely - St. John's Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation.

As a God-fearing Christian, the soldier would undoubtedly have been horrified by the Gnostics. As for
Vernon, he was never concerned about either embracing or rejecting Christianity.
Raised as an Anglican, he found that religion never came into his life much.
Weddings, baptisms, funerals and midnight mass at Christmas - those were his only contact with the Church.

He first read about Gnosticism as a teenager at a high school.

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The history of the project. A Gnostic text stated that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that they had a daughter, Sarah. He had found this notion delightfully

subversive. Many commentators, he discovered, had a soft spot for Gnostics and often portrayed them as the first hippies - tolerant, non-violent, vegetarian, non-sexist, immaterialist - practically the best people in the world. So it was a shock when he dug deeper and discovered that his beliefs were about as disturbing as you can get.

He had never heard of any other religion that openly proclaims this world, its Creator and everything in it to be evil to the core. I admired his perversity. If you went along with him, a new way of thinking about the world opened up. This meant that the dark forces had skillfully deceived the human race. We were condemned to ignorance.

Apart from the Gnostics, that is. They were not mistaken. For them, being "good" was meaningless. What counted was knowing the truth, and the Gnostic Truth was the surprising fact that the material world was evil. The stuff that made up the world - what we now label as protons, electrons, neutrons and all the atoms and molecules born from them - was imbued with evil. At the most fundamental level of material existence, evil was ingrained. Vernon remembered enough from his Oxford PPE degree to know that philosophers of antiquity often referred to the animus mundi - the soul of the world. For the Gnostics, this soul was irremediably wicked.

From this belief, everything flowed with inexorable logic. The Creator of the material world was evil, all who worshiped him were evil, everything that his prophets and priests proclaimed as true was false. On the other hand, all those who opposed prophets and priests were righteous. The task of the human soul was not to be good, but to be intelligent enough to escape this hell.

When describing the Creator of the world, the Gnostics used an ancient Greek word Demiurge, a term used by Plato that meant craftsman.
Because creation is intrinsically evil, the Demiurge - Demiurge in English - was identified with Satan. Sometimes the Gnostics used another term, Rex Mundi, meaning King of the World, but this was just another epithet for Satan the Devil.

The true God existed in a universe of pure and incorruptible light, the opposite of the violent world of matter, this cruel circus. Sometimes the angels of the divinely illuminated universe fell in love with the physical world. Sex, inevitably, was what they tried; Satan's perfect bait. Maddened with the desire for carnal knowledge, angels came to earth and inhabited human bodies to discover what sex was. Too late, they discovered that they were trapped.

When the physical body died, their souls were reincarnated into new bodies. There was no way out, unless we acquired enough wisdom, enough true knowledge, to understand how to return to the kingdom of the true God.
Gnosis – the ancient Greek word for knowledge – is all about gaining that special knowledge.
Faith didn't matter at all, only knowledge.

Gnosis is a religion for the intelligent, not for brainwashed blind believers

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since birth.
According to The Cainite Destiny, the Nazis were very familiar with these ideas. Were the Nazis the Gnostics? This would explain both his pathological hatred
of Jews. After all, by the Jews' own account, they were the Creator's chosen people. For the Jews, the Creator was Jehovah, but for the Gnostics, Jehovah was Satan.

It would also explain why Hitler was fascinated by religious relics, why the Nazis chose an ancient religious symbol as their emblem, why they sent expeditions around the world looking for proof that they were different from ordinary human beings. Was the Aryan race some ancient Gnostic cult tracing its origins back to Cain, the first human to go violently against the will of Jehovah?

Vernon grabbed his arm and closed his eyes. Everything fitted. These things could not be coincidence. The Destiny Cainite had a mad
fantasy of a deranged soldier. The Nazi leaders really thought it was true, didn't they? They truly believed that they were the descendants of Cain and that they had found the means to kill the Lord. When Hitler took possession of the Spear of Destiny, he was convinced that it gave him the power to do so. But how? Was the Spear really special?

He turned to Gresnick. The North American showed that he was intelligent and extraordinarily well informed on esoteric matters. How much does he know
about the spear? Much more than was in the DIA report, without a doubt. Just as Vernon was about to ask, he stopped. There was something about the colonel didn't like. Too confident? Quite the perfect soldier? He didn't trust
him, and he wasn't sure why. Or maybe he knew it too well.
He closed his eyes. The hailstones were louder than ever, threatening to wipe out the Chinook's metal carcass. It felt like the material world was coming alive, its soul burning. He was furious about something, and determined to destroy it.
It may be impossible for the Gnostics to kill God, but the destruction of a planet was a different matter. Across the universe, planets were dying. Earth itself was dying.
Billions of years in the future, it would cease to exist. It was, to use the oldest
of clichés, simply a matter of time. Had a group of scientists, infected with extreme Gnostic beliefs, worked out how to speed up the process? Perhaps they invented devices to manipulate time, to activate fault lines, to increase volcanic
activity. Perhaps the 'angel' who escaped from Thames House was the product of a top-secret genetic engineering experiment to make people resemble the angels the Gnostics claimed we all once were, and can be again. Maybe everything had a "rational" explanation, if that word still had meaning.

Vernon opened his eyes again and looked at the SAS soldiers. Most of them were cleaning their assault rifles or staring into space, as if they were in

meditation. Could he trust them? They were elite soldiers, but they had no idea what they were facing.
The wind was getting fiercer. The helicopter no longer appeared to be moving forward, but was caught in the eye of a violent storm.
Thunder boomed like artillery fire. It was easy to imagine that something was whipping up

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this storm, an elemental force touching the great energy locked in the world and concentrating it in a single location with catastrophic fury. The Chinook shook so much

that even Gresnick looked up from his file.
In the cockpit, the pilot was struggling with the controls and yelling at the co-pilot. The words disappeared amid the noise of wind, hail, rotor blades and engines. Everyone in the cabin was fully strapped into their seats, but loose kit bags that had fallen from the overhead lockers were sliding across the floor. In the distance, some faint lights appeared. Thank God, Vernon thought, almost there. He heard two of the SAS soldiers shouting that they could see a shape heading towards the side of the helicopter at high speed.

'Careful!' The pilot cried.
Inside the Chinook, all the lights flickered. 'God, did you see that? Gresnick shouted.
Vernon turned and looked out through the cockpit window. Something had appeared in front of the helicopter. Something. For a second, he thought a rip had appeared in space. The shape was so dark it was sucking light into it. It was more than an absence of light, it was as if the thing was actually killing light.
Vernon was certain he knew what it was, but his mind refused to accept it. He felt exactly as he had when all the lights went out back at Thames House.

'Jesus, what the fuck?' The navigator threw his hands in front of his face.
The soldier who was reading the Bible made the sign of the cross and stood up, holding his assault rifle. “You don't understand, do you?” he said, drawing hostile looks from his colleagues. "It's here, it's coming, just like the Bible said it would."

'What are you talking about, McGregor? His neighbor growled.
'You don't understand this - none of us are back from this life.' McGregor was wide-eyed.

'Shut up, soldier,' the captain shouted.
None of us are coming back. McGregor's words burned into Vernon's mind.
He was right, wasn't he? This was a one-way mission. And maybe the end was coming this very second.

Vernon's saliva proved foul. Is this what fear did to you? All of his muscles were flexing, preparing for combat. He blinked rapidly - Shit, he hadn't been seeing in color any longer, just black and white. Color Vision picked up a lot of intelligence, he remembered. It simply wasn't necessary in survival situations. Just the essentials: tunnel vision, monochrome, everything

stripped. Even time was becoming distorted, expanding, lengthening.
He was able to notice much more, every detail that could help save his life.

'I'll pray for your souls,' McGregor shouted before receiving a punch to the abdomen from his neighbour.

Vernon braced himself for a collision. With what, he wasn't sure.
"Fire the machine guns," Gresnick shouted to the pilot, but his voice turned on himself. The noise inside the helicopter was distorting every sound, turning human voices into nothing but strange sound effects. The 'whup whup' of the twin rotor blades had reached a deafening level.

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An unbelted SAS soldier tried to make his way to the front of the cockpit. Vernon thought the soldier planned to slide open the side door and shoot in the way with his assault rifle.

The pilot crashed the Chinook into an emergency dive and the helicopter fell to the ground, throwing the SAS man to the ground.
Vernon untied himself and tried to get the soldier to help back to his place.
The Chinook swayed again and Vernon fell to the ground. He found his face inches from the soldier's black boots, so close he could smell the Pole. This made him gag, and he had to fight not to vomit all over the soldier's feet.

Shaking his head, he took a sharp breath. His face ended up next to Gresnick's briefcase: the American must have dropped it in the confusion. Lucy's photo had slid out. Looking at that face,

he couldn't stop
one

spittle of vomit escapes his mouth.
When, every month, Lucy sent her letter telling him that she never wanted to see him again, she might as well have shot him. Before this letter, he had never thought of himself as anything other than a whole, happy person. Afterwards, he imagined that he had a hole in his chest, as if he had been shot at close range with a double-barreled shotgun. The wound, he knew, would never heal. Metaphysical injuries were much worse than the physical kind. Without medicine, without surgery, I could treat them.

The noise around the helicopter died down for a second. The Chinook had found the eye of the storm.

'We're fine,' Gresnick said, breathing hard. His forehead glistened with sweat.
"We leveled.

Vernon, unentangling himself from the SAS soldier, began stroking his chest. There were no physical injuries, but the old hole was still there, radiating raw pain. He dreaded seeing Lucy
again. Does he hate her for what she did to him? Even worse, does he still love her? He couldn't go through all this again.
“Making our approach for landing,” the pilot reported over the intercom. 'I don't know what happened up there, but we're fine. "
The SAS soldiers were holding their weapons and sternly looking out of the porthole windows.

Gresnick went forward, whispered to the pilot and returned seconds later, pale.
'What does the pilot think it was?' Vernon asked Gresnick returned to his seat. He avoided the photo of Lucy, looking at him from the ground.
Gresnick hesitated. 'He didn't get a clear view. "But did he see anything?
Gresnick leaned over, retrieving his folder and photo of Lucy. "He said the thing had wings.

31

he little cluster of picturesque houses stood in darkness, their walls of pure stone picked out by the headlights of the Land Rovers. No streetlights were anywhere in
the village of Tintagel. Lucy had never been here in the dark before, and never since this happened.

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As the convoy maneuvered through the few narrow streets, she felt a mysterious atmosphere. Abandonment. She was convinced that the residents were not sleeping in their homes because they were not here. The Government had
probably cut off gas and electricity supplies to isolated communities like this. The residents must have fled to the cities. As the train headed down a long
slope toward the castle and the sea, Lucy tried to summon the good feelings she once had for this place. She has made this trip ten times previously. Each time, the weather was perfect, and she thought she had discovered a backdoor to paradise.
These days did not belong to the routines of ordinary life. They were dyed with a unique shine.

Numinous was the word she liked to use. Tintagel was that kind of place, touched by the other world. But now, all that awaited her here was horror.
They parked outside the English Heritage ticket-office, the lights of the drive vehicle shining on the blue gloss-painted door. A sign, Scrappily handwritten in black marker, was attached to the door saying Temporarily Closed. We apologize for any inconvenience.

Lucy's guard told her to get out of the Land Rover and she climbed firmly out, crushing her right foot in a puddle. Frost covered the grass around
her. It was cold enough to snow. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out her rubber torch, wishing once again she had gloves.
One of the Swiss guards used his pistol to throw off the padlock on the gate closing the Heritage office of the ruins of Tintagel Castle. Kruger shouted at him in German. Lucy assumed he was angry that the shot might have given away
his position.
They climbed a narrow path, avoiding the iced-over puddles scattered everywhere. Kruger led the way with a torch set to a narrow beam. He told everyone not to wave their torches for fear of attracting attention. As they walked, they cast strange shadows. Lucy remembered once coming across a

antique sundial on Brick Lane in London. On it was an inscription: Umbra Sumus - We are shadows. This was what she thought she would become.
Kruger took him across a narrow bridge that separates the mainland from the small island, where the most intact sectors of castle ruins were situated. Even now, with its walls reduced to stumps, it was possible to imagine what the castle once looked like, as if the ghost were here, and now ever more shining in full view, with its tall towers and fluttering pennants, its knights in shining breastplates. riding outside over the drawbridge.

Kruger stopped in the middle of the ruined castle and told his men to rest.
They sat on the walls and began eating army rations from their
backpacks. Lucy sat down too, but Kruger kicked her foot.
"You're coming with me." He pointed to the surviving shell of the island's small chapel.
He went to the back of the castle, on top of the rock
outcrop near there.
'I won't.' Lucy turned her head.
Grabbing his hand, Kruger pulled him to his feet. 'I don't have time for this. "He began to pull her towards the gate leading to the chapel.
Lucy grabbed the gatepost and tried to hold on, but Kruger was too

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strong. He dragged her behind him, almost crushing her hand. All the while, the sea whistled.
They were just feet from the cliff-faces, and
there were no protective barriers. Inside, Lucy was rocking it. She was so close to where it all
happened. Please God, anywhere else on Earth but here.
Tintagel was a tomb where the clock kept the dead.
When they reached the chapel - little more than an outline on the floor after
centuries of decay - Kruger stopped and shone the flashlight into Lucy's eyes.
The light stung, and she raised her hands to block the beam.
'Don't trust Cardinal Sinclair, he said. "He is an ambitious man.
Lucy didn't know how to respond. Should she shout Kruger, or be cooperative, supportive, to try to win the round? 'What do you mean? " She spoke softly, as non-
confrontationally as possible, hoping she could convince him to turn back.

"Last year, the Pope had a health scare," Kruger said. 'There was speculation about who might succeed him. The Pope told me that this was likely to happen. Sinclair would initially claim to have no interest in becoming the new Pope, but, using his influence, he would ensure that the
Sacred College of Cardinals was unable to reach a decision. When the cardinals were deadlocked, he had to step forward and say, for the good of the Church, that he was willing to accept
the burden. Julius believed Sinclair would then be unanimously elected.

Lucy nodded, but she was barely hearing. She wanted to return to the others.
Why do they come here? This place had nothing to offer. It was past time to
leave. Furthermore, she remembered a disturbing fact. The founder of the Swiss Guard was... Pope Julius II.
If, as she now believed, he was a heretic, what did that mean about his private army?

"I hear the Holy College of Cardinals is now at an impasse. Kruger pointed the torch beam at the frost-covered grass, shining like a lake of ice. "And you think Sinclair will return to Rome and be proclaimed Pope?"
Lucy maintained her pretense of calm. Please get me out of here. 'Everything is exactly as Pope Julius predicted.
"But what's wrong with Sinclair having ambition? Why does he suspect?"
Lucy's ambition was to get as far away from Tintagel as possible. 'Popes must be humble. "

"I see." It was a ridiculously idealistic observation, Lucy thought. She pointed her torch at Kruger.
"Please, let's go back now." Looking into his blue eyes, she expected to see some sign of… she didn't know exactly. An answer? Sympathy? Kruger was so cold, a true soldier, his face without any trace of compassion. She couldn't imagine him loving anyone or anything. Except duty. That kind of abstract love would appeal to him, but what was certain was that he would never whisper things of love to a woman.

Kruger grimaced. “You have no idea, do you? You're still in denial that I asked for this. I don't know "" I am not why you brought me here.”
"You know exactly.
Lucy stood there in the darkness with the wind swirling around her. She had never felt more alone in her life. Kruger knew, didn't he? For some reason by the fans he brought
her here to where he happened. The sadist.

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'I'm here to make you face reality.' Kruger grabbed Lucy's parka cape and pulled it back. 'I'm going to make you break through all the junk in your head.'

Lucy gulped air, the wind blew in her face. She looked at Kruger, at his face moving in and out of her torchbeam. Maybe she should hit him with the torch, try to knock him

down, then run away. If she didn't, he would take her to that place.

'Please let me go. "Her voice was pathetic, carried away by the wind.
Why is Kruger doing this? Does he want to torture her, make her crazy again?
Another look crossed Kruger's face. Disgust?
'You can't lift me, can you? ", She vented. Maybe it was more than that.
He could kill her, just as Sinclair predicted. Throw her off the cliff.
"We're going for a little walk. Kruger grabbed again.
She tried to dig her heels into the ground, to resist the overwhelming force he exerted on her. For a second, she thought he was going to lift her off her feet.
"I won't," she cried. 'You can't make me. "

Kruger spun around like a child's toy, then wrapped her in his huge arms. Slowly, he maneuvered forward, as if moving through a coal sack. She kicked her heels against her shins.

'No, I beg you. "
Kruger kept pushing her forward, closer to the edge of the cliff. The moon broke through the clouds and cast a sickly light upon the sea of foam.

Lucy closed her eyes, trying to avoid thinking about what was happening. Agonizing pains were in his stomach, spreading through his blood to every part of his body.

“Open your eyes,” Kruger barked.
Thick, torrential rain was now coming down. Drops splashed Lucy's face. 'I told you to look.' Kruger's voice was a stern growl in Lucy's ear.
Slowly, she opened her eyes. At first, the blinding rain prevented him from seeing anything. Then his vision cleared. She was inches from the edge of the cliff, faced by the wild sea, throwing waves at her like the tentacles of a giant squid. She was afraid they would take her feet and she would plunge over the edge. Jagged rocks were below.
Kruger held her tightly, his body pressed against hers, his breath hot on her neck. He was panting.
When she looked out to sea, Lucy thought she saw little lights in the water, making the water glow with an ominous blue luminescence.
'You have to move on, Lucy. Kruger's voice was almost tender. "You can't let the past destroy you.

Lucy was afraid of hyperventilating. Was this how he felt? She was sure that she was

in the exact spot, looking at the same sea. It was about 2 a.m. The coroner said your father committed suicide some time between one and four o'clock seven months ago.

An entire life. Did he count to ten before he jumped or did he do it right away? He kept it so bottled up.

When she found his diary after his funeral, she discovered that his meticulous entries stopped the day his mother died.

'In the blue' was all he wrote that day. Every day afterward he wrote the

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same three words, the writing growing increasingly irregular.
Those words were burned into Lucy now. His whole life was in the blue. The sea glowed blue in front of her. The nightmare, living and breathing.
"He loved you, Lucy," Kruger said. 'Do you think he wanted you to end up in a home care?

Tears filled Lucy's eyes. People had always commented on how close she was to her parents, even if it was just a child. Sometimes she thought
love was
the worst thing in the world. What no one told you was that it was simply a seductive package for pain - the worst pain of all, because you never expected to find it underneath something so beautiful.

"Why?" She said, speaking to the blue of the sea. 'Why did you leave me? "She longed to hear her father's voice again. Cancer had taken her mother, but it was love that took her father, and love that put her in an asylum. Now she wanted her heart to freeze.

'You have to learn to love life again,' her psychiatrist told her. 'There is so much beauty out there, so many wonders. You just need to reach and take them. '

Do some people really believe this? They made it look so easy.
Over time, they learn. In the end, they would be flattened. They don't have the bitter

taste in your mouth, the nausea in your bellies, that came when love showed its true colors. But, one day, it would be, and it would be much worse for them, because they had denied it for so long.

Transfixed by the growing glow of the sea, Lucy wondered if her father's heart choked with love.
When love is everything and then it is snatched away, what can fill that
aching void?
His father's body was found down there in the freezing water, by a tourist in a rowing boat, taking photos of Tintagel from the sea. It was shameful, she thought that a stranger should
know about her father's death before her.
What did the tourist think when he fished the bloated body out of the water? He would have known for nothing that there was once this body, the love he enjoyed. The sea took all that human warmth away. All that was left was an anonymous body in the water with no one to speak for it, to do any caring. A complete stranger finding a dead body and wondering what to do with it so often marks the end of a life.

Some life.
Sometimes, back at the convent, Lucy imagined her father calling her from the sea, inviting her to join him and her mother in death. The family would be whole again. Love
restored, the Wasteland redeemed. Now she had the opportunity to be with him, but she
couldn't jump into the blue. As long as she lived, she did not want to go into the water again.

Still stunned that his father killed himself here of all places. Arthurian romance
never interested him. As a Classics professor at the University of Bristol, he was obsessed with
Ancient Rome. I would like to tell you that much of what we knew about Rome was wrong. His favorite example was the thumbs up used at the end of gladiator fights.

'We've got it completely wrong around," he said. "When the crowd

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gave a thumbs up, it didn't mean they wanted the loser to be saved.
It was the opposite: they were demanding that he be dispatched to the afterlife.
The thumbs down meant they wanted the defeated fighter to remain on this earth, to live.
Something that would have been blatantly obvious to any Roman ended up
being perfectly misunderstood by us.
This left a big impression on Lucy. How many of the biggest certainties were false, just like the thumbs up sign? It was impossible to trust anything. Which one should she trust between Kruger and Sinclair? Her life might depend on her, but she had no idea.
Thumbs up or thumbs down?
Was it because of her that her father came here to end her life? He knew how much Arthur's story meant to her. This was the place where Arthur was supposedly conceived. It
could even be Camelot. Every time she visited Tintagel, she called her father
and told him how charming she was. She described its spectacular scenery, talked about how powerful the sea was, about the towering cliffs, how exquisite he
would find it if he never came. Did he finally make the trip because it was the closest he could get to her without physically being with her? No one, on the day they planned to kill themselves,

would like to see their loved ones, but maybe they would choose a place that reminded them of the people closest to them.
How much she wanted to see him again. To say all those things she never had the chance to say to him, to love again. Why did he do it? It was so unfair. They must not do
these things, these irrevocable things. Why doesn't he talk to her? Together they could have coped. On my own, there was no hope.
He remembered something Kafka said: There is an infinite amount
of hope, but not for us. These words could very well be engraved in your heart.

When his father jumped, did he hear anything other than the fury of the sea? Increasingly, she longed for the silence, which allowed her to imagine that she
was alone in the world. Sometimes that was all she wanted. Other people caused pain.
If it didn't exist, she wouldn't suffer. Above all, she would be protected with love. Sometimes she was sure love was the proof there wasn't God. No
benevolent deity could cause something so cruel.
She had loved only one other person - James Vernon. It was a dark night, freezing, just like this one, when she decided to tell him that it was over between them. She didn't have the courage to say it to his face so she took the coward's way and wrote a letter. Love made her do it. She couldn't go on until she lost the last of the people who meant something to her. Better to finish it and save them both from suffering. It didn't work, though. Just another reason to be depressed.
“You know about my father, don't you?” she said.
Kruger pressed his face against hers. For a second it felt lovely and cozy.
"It was crucial that we know so much about the..." "What?"
Kruger didn't respond.
"I can't help you," said Lucy. “It's all a mistake. Can't you see?” Kruger's hand pressed against the small of his back.
'Should I push him now? "Kruger's mouth was right against his ear. 'Into the blue.'
Lucy tried to scream, but the wind was blowing in her face again.

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"Two of my men died for you tonight," said Kruger. "Another is seriously injured. And why? To save a lunatic? So perhaps we should forget the our

mission. Maybe we should end this here. Maybe it's better for everyone."
Lucy was there, rooted. She couldn't think of any words. The entire sea was glowing now, as if every sea creature, no matter how small, was luminescent.

"Do you see that glow?" Kruger said. "I know what's causing this. Something is very close. It's going to change everything. If you're not ready to fight it, you could very well be dead. We'll all be dead soon unless you get your judgment on you.

Lucy wanted to say, 'I don't understand,' but that would be lying. Something had changed. Every part of her sensed it. A strange electricity was

up in the air. She felt a presence nearby, a creature of some kind, but so much more. Something had come to earth, ancient and unspeakable. It was here, now, watching. Everything in the sea was shining because of this creature. She knew his name but refused to say it.
Soon, they would all be dead. She would join her father. She leaned against her hand. Not that she felt like saying. Maybe it was the love required. But she couldn't face that blue sea. Any death except that.

Kruger pulled back from the edge of the cliff and turned her round until they were face to face, his arms tightly around her back. It took her a second to realize he was shaking. Overwhelmed by emotion? He wasn't the type. But he was trying to get himself together, wasn't he?

"You've seen Rafael's mural," he said. "Don't you think we have examined every part of it? Don't you think we have done everything in our power to understand it? You are the key, Lucy. We are sure several of Rafael's mural-like panels provide a map of where you'll be in the next 72 hours. One of the panels shows King Arthur in Camelot, and there's no doubt Raphael thought Camelot was here in Tintagel. He painted this place exactly. I didn't bring you here, Raphael did.

He reached into his pocket, took out a piece of paper and read a bizarre sentence: Arthur's conception. Only the chosen one can do what no other can. The place of suffering. The death plunge. The death of one of them, or the death of all."

Lucy swallowed. "What is that? '
'Nostradamus wrote a note for each panel. They're all cryptic, but this one is pretty clear, don't you agree? Arthur was conceived in Tintagel. Your father jumped to his death here. This place makes you suffer unbearably, doesn't it? You're shaking like a little girl, but it's time to grow up.
Somehow, you will do something here that will eliminate any doubt about who you are. If you fail, we will all die.

Lucy shook her head. Kruger kept saying these things to her and it still didn't make sense. She didn't have great talents. There was nothing special about her. Everything that depended on her was already doomed. Anyway, how could Raphael be responsible for his presence here? Kruger was the reason. He was twisted. Why does he insist on telling her how important she is

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he was? Could there be a sick joke?
“You've already been in a mental prison, Lucy. Kruger's expression was a strange mix of despair and kindness. He looked confused, as if he didn't know whether to despise her or love her. “I'm trying to free him. You need to face your demons before you can move forward. This is the place that will destroy you or set you free. '

"Free me?" Lucy echoed. There was only one thing that could do that.
She needed her medication. Necessary to close your eyes. Walk away in peace.

“Stop it,” Kruger barked. “The world needs you. I don't care if you believe it or not, I do.” He pulled down the front zip of her coat and reached inside her uniform, cupping first her left breast and then on the right. She was too shocked to scream. Snatching the medicine bottle from her right breast pocket, he held it in front of her like a trophy.

“Give me that you sick.” Her hands flailed in front of Kruger, but he threw the bottle past her into the sea.

Her mouth fell open as she tried to imagine a world without the oblivion, the chemical mercy, the medication brought.
Kruger grabbed her arms and shook her... so much that she thought she would explode. His expression was fanatical. Then he let her go. She fell, crying, dropping the torch. She lay down on the damp grass near the edge of the cliff.
"I can't have any of this. I can't go on."
Kruger up to her in the wind. "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior?
Lucy raised her head. To believe? Once, everything made sense to her. She went to mass every Sunday, confessed her sins every six weeks, prayed for absolution and is believed to have been granted it. She believed in good works, justice, divine grace, the intercession of the saints. When she took Holy Communion, she had no doubt that it is exactly what it was - by swallowing the host, the priest offered, she was in direct, holy communion with the body of Christ, the divine essence, the holy of

santos.

But now she didn't believe in anything. According to the Church, his father was a suicide, guilty of a mortal sin that could never be forgiven, a man condemned for eternity. So, there was no justice, no heavenly grace, without the mercy of Jesus Christ. There was nothing at all.

"Your life is a wasteland, Lucy Galahan. Kruger shone the flashlight at her as she lay in the grass. "This is what happens to those who turn their backs on God. The entire world is becoming a wasteland. When humanity rejected God, it was only a matter of time before God rejected them.

She thought he was about to kick her as she stood there looking at him.
Strangely, she felt sorry for him. He placed as a store in absurd things.
'Do you think I'm happy that you were chosen? Why not me? But God always works in mysterious ways. So we're stuck with you. Now get up."

Lucy didn't move. She wasn't going anywhere with this man. The world could take care of itself. Closing her eyes, she lay down, pressing her face against the wet grass. She didn't want to look at Kruger when she heard him scold him.

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express more. The ground beneath her was frozen hard. She felt her body heat draining into the rocks and soil. Maybe Kruger would realize she was a goner and leave her alone.

She was amazed when Kruger fell and lay next to her on the grass. He threw the torch away. What is he going to do? It was as if he had

was broken by everything that happened tonight, by all her efforts that would be so futile if she refused to help him.
"I can't save anyone," she whispered. "Leave me alone, I beg you.
Kruger's head had moved away from her and he was prostrate, lying in an uncomfortable position. She assumed he couldn't hear her because of the wind.
'Why don't you listen to me? "She struggled to raise her voice. As she looked at him, she realized how much she wanted to hear his voice, to be forgiven, to be forgiven, told that all of this could happen without her. Kruger was so different from James.
Whenever James hugged her, he made her feel safe and loved. Not Kruger. Where was the kindness, the humanity? He was the only one who needed help.

Reaching out her hand, she tried to touch him. There
was something dreamlike about the way her hand moved, as if it didn't belong to her. Was she hallucinating? She wanted Kruger stroke hair. He was such a strong man, such a robust, silent type, that he sometimes seemed so attractive. If she touched his hair, maybe she could draw on his power, feel his strength coursing through her back and into her body. She had been so weak these past few months.
Why was he so quiet? Was he crying? Maybe that's why he wouldn't turn his face towards her. He knelt down. His knees were wet. The wind was swirling around her, much fiercer than before. Kruger continued to lie there, as if he had simply given up and just wanted to rest. He was vulnerable, fragile, just like everyone else. Did he let it touch him? No, not Kruger. He was so tough, so fragile, that he hated it if she laid a hand on him.

But the hand kept moving forward. Moving along Kruger's abandoned torch beam is a long shadow, much larger than his own hand, so much more defined. Umbra
Sumus. She and Kruger became shadow people, their silhouettes more
real than they were. His hand suddenly came into contact with the back of Kruger's head, pressing against his hair. He didn't speak, not a word.

Why is your hair so sticky? To sweat? The rain continued to attack them. Her hand got wet as she moved it through his hair. This was all wrong. None of that was happening. It couldn't be.

She took her hand back and looked hard at the captain. It took him a few seconds to make sense of the thick, dark liquid spreading over his head... to properly register
its color.
And then she started screaming.

32

Ernon, standing in front of the entrance to Lucy's convent, watched the Chinook pilot pacing up and down in front of the cockpit, and

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asked what he was thinking. Without it, everyone would be dead. What the hell had they found up there?

It was strange, he thought, that he hadn't heard a single soldier mention what had happened in the air less than an hour earlier. Everyone was getting on with their jobs, pretending everything was normal, pretending no winged creatures attacked. But he had seen it with his own eyes. Everything they had. At the time, most SAS soldiers were content to dismiss him as a bizarre bird, or some kind of giant bat. Even the batting bible McGregor kept his mouth shut. The co-pilot had unconvincingly written it off as a mirage, caused by strange atmospheric conditions, but the pilot said nothing. Vernon knew it was neither of those things, but the alternative was absurd.

The form had frozen for an instant outside the cabin, wings outstretched, as if it were being crucified. It was in the form of a man. No light came with it and no light reflected from it. Vernon shuddered. Did he really believe that a dark angel had dragged them from London?

At university he was enchanted by the idea of George Orwell's doublethink. It was idiotic, he thought, for Orwell to argue that people could simultaneously hold two contradictory beliefs and accept both completely. Now he understood perfectly. It was the only way to stay sane in a situation like this.

The helicopter, sitting in the middle of the deserted parking lot, looked like a huge mistake. It was bathed in the glow of three spotlights that the nuns had used to illuminate a bronze sculpture of Jesus Christ, overlooking the iron doors of the chapel. As SAS troopers drift past, heading toward the loading ramp at the rear of the helicopter, Vernon asks how much more the nuns insist on enlightening their Savior. They had their own generators, but they wouldn't be able to supply them indefinitely. Sooner or later, they would have to shut Jesus down.

The first SAS soldiers back from the sweep confirmed that the convent was clear. The bodies of the four soldiers - two Americans and two Swiss - were lying in a temporary morgue in the convent's small gymnasium. There was no sign of Lucy, and none of the remaining Swiss Guards or Delta Force defectors. Tire tracks in the grass behind the convent's chapel showed that five vehicles left at high speed on a southern road. There were other banners on the opposite side of the convent, indicating two trucks. Vernon had already alerted local police, telling them to get in touch immediately if they spotted the unexpected convoys.

As for the nuns and nursing staff, none were injured. The Mother Superior said they hid in their rooms as soon as the shooting started. She was keen to get information from Vernon about what was going on, but he said he couldn't reveal anything because of the Official Secrets Act. As it turned out, she was better informed than he was. Not only did she know he had come for Lucy, she was able to tell him that Cardinal Sinclair, No. 2 of the Vatican, had been here a few hours earlier, specifically to see Lucy. It looked like he went out with her

and the soldiers. Presumably he was in command of the Swiss Guard. Did that mean Lucy was safe? But maybe the deserters got there first and took Lucy and the cardinal

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with them. There wasn't enough evidence to say either way.
Mother Superior kept saying how sweet Lucy was, and how she was praying she wouldn't come to harm. Vernon had made his excuses and left.
As one of the last SAS soldiers crept past him, Vernon noticed that the soldier was carrying a slide projector. Just as he was about to ask her what he was doing with her, his cell phone rang. He looked at the display: Commander Harrington. The conversation was brief. Harrington said a police officer based in Tintagel village in Cornwall had reported a gunshot. Several Land Rovers were parked near the castle. When Vernon asked if there was any news of the two escaped prisoners, Harrington hung up the phone.
"Let's get going," Vernon shouted Gresnick. The colonel was sitting on a wall several meters away. He did not bother helping with the search for the convent, preferring to spend his time studying its archives. Vernon didn't like the way Gresnick had taken some troops to one side before the sweep began and whispered conspiratorially to them.
Earlier, Vernon had noticed the American continually looking at Lucy's photograph. It bothered her that Gresnick was so interested in looking at her.
Doesn't he have something better to do with his time?
Lucy was, perhaps, too much of a beauty, but that didn't make her any less impressive. There was something seductive in his expression, a sad, soulful look. She had those big blue eyes and black hair that sometimes formed a wave under her chin, sometimes fell like bangs over her face.
Once again, he thought of Sergeant Morson's comment that she was the most important person in the world. Did Morson believe she was some kind of Messiah? Lucy would have found the idea so funny. What does Messiah look like anyway? I once read a book claiming that Jesus Christ was a five meter tall woman with a genetic disease that made her look like a man. The book made the valid point that anyone who wanted to help the weak, the humble, the poor and the rejected was unlikely to be a six foot tall, hunky, blue eyed, blonde Aryan with an enviable six pack especially because They were perfect Aryans quite thin on the ground in ancient Judea. Why not a repulsive, bizarre, sick woman? Who better to defend the oppressed?
Gresnick closed his file, climbed down the stone wall and walked toward Vernon.
"We don't know for sure why the deserters want Lucy," he said, as they both returned to the Chinook. "It's essential to find out.
'Why?'
"If the deserters need Lucy alive at any cost, you know what that means." "I'm not sure I do."
"Stop it, you know exactly what I'm getting at."
'Why not say it?'
'Very good. To ensure that the enemy cannot use Lucy, we will have to kill her. "

hey were running towards Lucy, shouting something, but couldn't make it out because of the noise of the wind. The light of the Kruger torch shone in his hands.
Blood was everywhere, even under her fingernails, dripping from her.

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The soldier who had guarded her Land Rover was the first to reach her. She thought he was going to yell at her, but instead he bent down to look at Kruger. Two soldiers grabbed her and dragged her back the way they would come. Other soldiers hid behind the castle's ruined walls and fired bursts of machine guns into the darkness. Some of the bullets formed bright arcs across the sky. Lucy tried to remember what name was given to bullets like that. Tracer? They were incredibly beautiful, like lightning bugs at high speed. The night shone.

The soldiers pushed her down the rough path to the small beach that lay beneath the cliffs, next to 'Merlin's Cave', the large hollow beneath Tintagel Castle where legend has it Merlin was born.
Cardinal Sinclair was already there on the beach with several soldiers. Waving torches, they stood next to five motorized boats that had been swept ashore. Kruger must have arranged for them to be picked up here, so they could continue their journey by sea. There was probably a ship waiting for them off the coast. Lucy shook her head. If they thought she was staying on a ship, they were crazy. The sea was a forbidden zone, a cemetery with waves of tombstones.

Staring at her bloody hands, she wanted to vomit. Kruger would still be alive if it weren't for her. She had to take the blood, but she didn't want to go near the sea. Returning with the torch, she spotted a pool among the rocks. Something glittered in the water. The soldiers shouted at her as she ran towards it, but she ignored them.

Kneeling at the edge of the pool, she dipped her hands in. The water was ice cold and she let out a sigh. After rinsing off the blood, she took the water and splashed it over her face.

"Get the boat," one of the soldiers shouted at her. 'Stay low, for Christ's sake. There's a sniper outside. "

Once again, she ignored him. Shining her torch into the water, she looked at the glowing object. She had a vague idea what it was, but it seemed impossible. His heart was beating.

Leaves.

It had gotten itself tangled between some pebbles. She breathed hard.
Frantically at first, then more slowly, she cleared the stones until the object was in clear view. Mother of Mercy. First Kruger, now this. She didn't want to look at the object, to be reminded of everything it represented. crying

It sprouted in the eyes, stinging and burning. A single word was engraved on the silver medal shining at her from the pool - Lucy.
Could she bear to touch him? Maybe it would take away some of your pain. Closing her eyes, she pulled it out. Maybe she should throw him into the sea where he belonged. He needed all the water in the world to dilute the emotions he contained. She still remembered how amazed she was when her father's body was found without his locket on its chain. She never saw him without it. Even when he went diving, he wore it. Now, clutching it to her heart, she tilted her head.

All over again, she was in the black, being dragged into oblivion.

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His eyes opened. The water in the pool was rippling. She felt something strange in the air, just like she had on the cliff. Something was
here, watching.
She looked at the boats. She needed to get out of here, but the sea was out of the question. Even though she had the courage to get close
to the water, the conditions were getting wilder. The soldiers in the boats
shouted as she started in. All around, bullets hit the sand and the sea of machine gun fire from the clifftops.
A flash exploded high over the beach, casting a pink glow over
Tintagel Castle. The front of Merlin's cave lit up.
Someone grabbed one of Lucy's arms: the Land Rover guard. Her face, trapped in her torchbeam as she squirmed all over, was at its peak.
'What do you think you're doing? We can't let him be captured.
He had the same intensity as Kruger. Were all the Swiss Guards like this?
'I'm not going with you. 'The water... I can't do that.'
The soldier was there, apparently not knowing what to do. "Only one person believes in you," he said. "The rest of us thought the whole thing was crazy, but the captain said that the moment I saw him, he knew there was no mistake - that he was the only one."
'What?'
"What really gets me is that he admired you. You had an inner strength, he said.
Now he gave his life for you.
Captain Kruger admired? Lucy shook her head. As for inner strength, she
couldn't imagine anyone weaker.
The soldier looked at the cliff where Kruger died. 'I wish the shooter had gotten you instead.' Grabbing her hand, he tried to pull away.
Lucy dug her heels into the damp sand. I have to leave. Kicking the soldier
in the leg, she broke free and ran towards Merlin's cave. She heard a scream from above and all the gunfire stopped, but all her attention was focused
on the cave. There, she would be safe, away from the whistling
sea, from all the soldiers, from whatever monstrous thing was out there. Several Swiss guards jumped out of the boats and ran after her.

She reached the cave ahead of them. She only had a second or two to sweep her torchbeam around the stone walls to find a hiding place. Spotting a small recess in the cave wall, she threw herself into it, forming herself into a tight ball. But the Swiss guards saw her immediately, grabbed her legs and tried to drag her out.
Fiercely, she kicked back. His hands reached out for anything to grab. As the fingers stretched out, they made contact with something. It was hard and regular, man-made, pressed against the recessed wall. At the exact moment she touched it, an electric current surged through her.
She closed her eyes, trying to shut out the images that now flooded her mind: barren landscapes, Roman soldiers, ancient palaces, bearded prophets. What was happening to her? This object was hidden here many centuries ago, she thought. Someone had created a perfect hiding place for him using a natural flaw in the cave wall. She kept pulling,
and more and more of the object slid out with virtually no resistance. She barely knew what she was doing, but she couldn't stop herself. The object was getting heavier, and she found it to be several feet long.

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As the Swiss Guards dragged her out, her hands fully locked around the object and she pulled it with her, freeing it from its hiding place.
When her eyes opened, the Swiss guards were looking at her. Their mouths had fallen open. Nobody moved. They just stayed there. Cardinal Sinclair was with them.
Without warning, he dropped to one knee and made the sign of the cross. Everyone else did the same. They had a reverent look in their eyes.
If they had gone crazy? Lucy was still holding onto whatever it was she had pulled out of the recess. Several torches pointed at him, and he shone in their light. She wanted to rub her eyes. In his hand was a sword in mint condition. She knew the legend of King Arthur better than anyone. Arthur was the rightful king because he drew a sword from a stone. Now she had done the exact same thing. But this sword did not belong to any English knight. He wasn't even European. The grip was made of gold plates engraved with ornamental designs. There was no characteristic cup of medieval European swords. The gleaming blade had Latin writing on one edge, and Aramaic on the other. Lucy suspected it was from ancient Judea, when the Romans ruled there from about two thousand years ago.

... a

"There is no doubt now," said the cardinal. 'She's the only one. "
"It's not what you think. I found it, that's all." Lucy was terrified by that look in his eyes.

"No one but you could have found that sword," said the guard. "Right before us, you pulled from the stone."

"Stop resisting, Lucy," Sinclair said. "There is no mistake." He leaned down and gently released his fingers from the sword's hilt. Raising the sword, he kissed the blade. It
was such a strange gesture for a cardinal, a man of peace. 'The One,' he said again.

The One? Lucy Galahan - the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Redeemer? Insane. She came from a mental asylum, but that doesn't make her crazier than these people. The world needed a saint, a genius, a leader of men. He didn't need her.
'Get back to the boats,' the guard shouted. 'We're going.'
The others jumped to their feet and ran out of Merlin's cave. Sinclair dragged back, holding a three-meter-long sword.
Lucy was left alone with her guard. His eyes were full of tears. 'Captain Kruger said that once we arrived at Tintagel you would answer all queries,' he said.

Lucy trembled. Captain Kruger's words came back to her: Only the chosen can do what no other can.

'Oh, my God,' she said.
The guard seemed paralyzed. 'My brother did not die in vain.
Brother? Lucy looked at the soldier's face and only now did she see the resemblance. She felt suffocated. Taking the soldier's free hand, she whispered, "I'm so sorry. Your brother...
"Let's go." He helped her to her feet.
She was stunned as they exited the cave. The noise was incredible. The bullets were again splashing the sand and water. Tracer fire lit up the night.
Stuck. It was impossible to escape from here.
When they tried to reach the others, Lucy's boots sunk into the marshy sand and she fell forward onto her face. The shooting from the cliffs immediately stopped.

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All she wanted to do was stay there. She was soaked and the wind was freezing her to the bone, but anything was preferable to getting close to those boats. What kind of Messiah was she? Scared of the sea, scared of going back and even more scared of going forward.

Kruger's brother pulled him to his feet. “If you're afraid of the sea, don't look.” He grabbed the hood of his coat and pulled it over the front of his head. Mistreating her, he packed her to the nearest boat.

Lucy closed her eyes and tried to shut down each sensation. A second later, she heard Sinclair screaming that the sword had been shot out of his hand. He was desperate to get her back.

"Leave him," cried Kruger. “There's no time. Lucy is all that matters.” All the boats moved out to sea, the outboards roaring, trying to force a path through the rough seas. Lucy sat by the engine, shaking. The soldiers were chatting excitedly, but she was only focusing on her fear. The wind had picked up again and waves were attacking from the sides.

His coat was saturated with water. She figured the sea was deliberately forcing them back to shore. They capsize before they get close to any ships out there at sea.

They had only traveled about twenty meters from the beach when a huge wave crashed over the boat. With the hood covering her face, Lucy doesn't see something. The wave crashed into her and she fell backwards into the icy waves.

Instantly, asphyxiating water swallowed her. In the blue. It had actually happened. She kicked frantically with her legs, but the movement soon began to slow. Drowning.

They need air. Desperately, she tried to remember how she used to swim. Did she once cut the water with efficient and powerful blows? It seemed impossible. His arms flapped uselessly. You can't swim. You can't live.

You can't do anything. She simply hung up in the water, unable to resist. Soon the little breath he had left would run out, and everything would be over. All she could see was blue, an infinite amount of it. I am dying.

Someone grabbed her neck and began to pull her to the surface. Your father? Can a ghost save you? The blue in his mind began to fragment, breaking into a trillion tiny dots, then rose like dust.

When he opened his eyes again, she was lying on the beach, on her back, panting, water dripping from the corners of her mouth. His coat had been washed. She looked up at the sky. Was death black like this? Was that what greeted mom and dad? Turning her head, she saw the cardinal beside her. It surprised her that he was a very strong swimmer. And he managed to find the sword he was forced to leave behind. He was holding it like he had never let go, like it was the most precious object on earth.

She tried to lift her head to see what had happened to the boats, but the pain shot through her neck and her head fell back. She hoped Brother Kruger and his men would forget about her. Go back to where they came from, out of harm's way.

"Don't shoot," Sinclair shouted, standing up and frantically waving his arms at the boats. "You can't kill her. She's innocent."

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Lucy tried to process the words. What do they mean? Christ. His heart was pounding. Kruger had orders to kill her if she was captured, didn't he? His brother was forced to move on. She tried to move, but couldn't.
"Mortars!" Someone shouted in an American accent.
Several torches shone in Lucy's face. Rifles were pointing at her. The sea began to explode as mortars rained down on the boats.
"Get up," said the American voice.
It was quickly hushed up. A helicopter had appeared overhead, its searchlight pointing straight down onto the beach.

34

He Chinook's searchlights had picked out a group of soldiers in a tight cluster heading away from the beach, but Vernon couldn't see any sign of Lucy. Maybe she was among them, but he couldn't be sure. Some soldiers were throwing themselves at the helicopter, but he didn't want to return fire for fear of hitting Lucy. They had to have an exact fix on it.

"Take us down," Vernon ordered the pilot. The SAS squad were checking their weapons and preparing to disembark from the rear ramp. For them it was just a standard hostage rescue operation with some complicating factors - It would be against elite forces, either Delta Force or Swiss Guards, the exact location of the hostage was unknown and the success of the mission was totally dependent on the extraction of their hostage. life.
Vernon was horrified when Gresnick previously said that Lucy might have to be killed. He couldn't believe how callous the American was. Lucy was an innocent victim in all of this. She may not even have been in a state capable of understanding what was happening to her. He had given the colonel strict instructions that Lucy must not be harmed under any circumstances.
As the helicopter searched for a landing spot, Vernon looked at Gresnick. The American was mounting a magazine on his Ruger P85 pistol.
'No stray shots, Colonel.
Gresnick looked at him. “I’m a straight shot.
Vernon questioned whether he should ask Gresnick for his firearm. It was hard to believe how things had changed. At one point he thought it was Gresnick attracted to Lucy. The next thing, the American was talking about killing her.
Was it just an act, all up front? He feared Gresnick was real.
The helicopter began to vibrate, first gently, then with increasing force. The pilot struggled with the controls, while the co-pilot shouted information at him. The Chinook rocked back and forth, then dove up and down. Something was wrong, catastrophically wrong.

Vernon looked at the pilot, wanting him to say everything was OK. Instead, the pilot took his hands off the controls and sat down. Jesus.
'Fly the damn thing,' Gresnick barked.
For a second I thought American Vernon was about to point his pistol, but the pilot just sat there doing nothing.
"Prepare for landing," the co-pilot shouted.

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Everyone sat down, sang and bowed, protecting their heads.
Vernon couldn't figure out what was wrong with the pilot. This was the famous former Night Stalker. Nerves of steel, ability to remain calm in tight situations and so on. Not now. He's
totally lost.
The helicopter's shield began to fold in on itself, like a crushed tin can.
Vernon realized why the pilot wasn't doing anything - the helicopter wasn't in his control.
Another thing was moving it.
The helicopter fell forward. The pilot jumped back to the controls and tried to pull him out of freefall, but it was too late.
“We're going down!” he shouted.

****

Vernon opened his eyes. He tried to move, but he couldn't. Something was pressing on his chest. Everything was dark. He wondered if he was gone

blind, but then he saw dozens of burning fragments around him. When he pushed against the thing on his chest, he realized it was a body. With the light from the burning cabin, he saw who it was... McGregor, the religious fanatic, still held the Bible in his hand. Nauseous, he pushed his body away, then fell back down, exhausted. All your energy is gone. He closed his eyes again. Shooting? He was sure he could hear automatic fire not far away. Then he heard breathing. Someone was crouching over him.

"James?
That voice. It couldn't be. It must be mind-blowing. His eyes opened once more.
Lucy.
Exactly how he remembered her. That dark hair falling over his face. His eyes, so tender, so full of compassion.
Someone was looking at him. Scared, he tried to move away. He was a man with a
dog collar - a priest. God, last rites. A third face appeared, which he recognized immediately: Sergeant Morson, one of the missing Thames House prisoners. How could he have gotten here?

“So who's the prisoner now? Morson said, then turned to a soldier standing next to him. “Finish him. '

Vernon heard the soldier pulling back the blade of his pistol and releasing it. Bullet loaded. Any
second now.
He wanted to say something to Lucy. To ask for forgiveness? To forgive her? To ask you why? For Then he heard the ...
shot.

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ucy felt bad. The Americans had made him change out of his wet clothes and given him a white padded winter uniform. It was too big for her. She kept putting her hands in her pockets, trying to find the
medicine.
Kruger had thrown the bottle into the sea, but was convinced it would return if she concentrated enough. That was supposed to be how things worked. The dead must

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return to life if you lose them enough.
She needed her medicine more than ever. In Greek mythology, dead souls drank from Lethe, one of the rivers of the underworld. He made them
forget their previous lives and prepared to be born again. She wished to have medicine made from Lethe water. If she forgot everything, she might be able to start over too.

They had taken her away from the wreckage by helicopter and placed her in the back of a military truck full of American soldiers. Now they were traveling along a dark,
deserted road. At some point, she hoped, she would wake up and be back in her convent room, looking at her paintings. Safe. This one

nightmare became much worse. Somehow, she managed to keep James out of her dreams. No more.

It shocked her to see it there in all that burning debris. When the American sergeant told his colleague to film James, she yelled at him to stop. If she could,
she would have shot in front of the bullet herself. But someone started shooting.
The Swiss Guards, he thought. She was dragged away, but when she looked back, the soldier assigned to kill James was dead.
James Vernon. When she saw his face, the love she thought she had destroyed burned again, almost overwhelming her. She prayed he had survived.
There was so much she wanted to say to him.
She tilted her head. The soldier sitting opposite had never once caught her eye.
She was freaking out. He wore a different uniform than
the others, he was the only black one among them... and he was clearly under guard. If he comes with James in the helicopter? What in God's
name happened to the aircraft? She had never seen anything like it, that thing that was wrapped around her, grabbing her like a toy. He tossed it around, then threw it to the ground. When nightmares become real, it means that one or the other you have gone crazy, or the things you fear most are really out there.
No one told him where they were going. In fact, all the Americans, apart from her sergeant, stood behind her, barely looking at her. They had put Cardinal Sinclair in another truck, so she has no one to talk to. I wanted to thank you for saving your life. Lying on the beach, looking out into the night, she realized how happy she was to still be alive. However, part of her insisted that the best thing for her would be death. She could hear the ancient whispers, telling her to take every opportunity to kill herself. But there was no denying the relief he felt when the cardinal pulled him to safety. Left to the same, perhaps she would have let the water rush into her lungs. How can you want life and death at the same time?
She had already read about Schrodinger's cat, a hypothetical cat in a closed black box containing a poison capsule that may or may not release its lethal
contents. Scientists pondered whether at any particular time the cat was alive or dead. His conclusion was that, in a sense, he was alive and dead, at least until the lid was removed and his fate discovered. He felt like he was in the same ghostly, indeterminate state as the cat.
She should never have doubted the cardinal. No one risks their life for you if they wish you harm. When she saw him leaning over James, beginning
to give him the last rites, she asked if he could perform another miracle and

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stop him from dying. It seemed ridiculous that people were telling her how special she was. If she had any powers, she would have used them to save James.

The truck went over a collision, and the man in front of her fell forward onto her.

"Come back". One of the others pushed the man back to his place at the riflepoint.

During the confusion, the man put something in Lucy's hand. She looked at him and gave him a strange look. Discreetly, she took the towel the sergeant had given her before drying herself and covered the note with it. This gave her the opportunity to look at him when no one was looking.

"I'm Colonel Brad Gresnick," he said. "I came with James Vernon. I'm a friend.
She crumpled the note and put it in her pocket. A friend? She didn't even
know this man, but he was telling her that he was her friend. He said he knew James, but there was no proof. Maybe he was a plant on a mission to gain your trust.

Too much paranoia, or not enough? She was so confused. She didn't want to look at the man. Instead, she looked out of the opening in the back of the truck. She could understand why some
people were saying that the apocalypse was near. The light was unnatural light and the taste of
everything was indefinably strange. There was an odd quality to the air, a
peculiar acrid smell.
People seemed to crackle as they moved, showering the world with
little blue sparks. It was as if everyone had grown faint halos. A world of saints... of angels?

Then she heard an unearthly scream. None of the soldiers reacted, except the man in front of
them. He looked as scared as she did. There was no doubt that he shared his thoughts on the piercing howl.

Nothing human could have done this.

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Ernon could hear the engines. The vibrations passed through him. In motion. Where he was? He opened his eyes again, but this time there was no burning debris, no soldier's body,
no priest giving him extreme rites, no Sergeant Morson. Most of all, not Lucy. How wonderful it was to see her again, just
that glimpse, but so much disappointment to know that it must have been a dream. Now, there he was in a white room, on the bed. He moved his head. Someone was next to him, a soldier in a black uniform.

"I'm Sergeant Ernst Kruger," the man said.
Vernon tried to understand the accent. Definitely not American: European English.
'Do you remember what happened?' Kruger asked. Fragments, dreams: Vernon wasn't sure what he remembered.
Kruger explained patiently. A helicopter crash. Crew wiped out.
Half an
SAS unit killed as well. The others somehow managed to fight his

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way out. They returned an attack, but lost two other men. One of the SAS soldiers killed a soldier who was about to shoot Vernon. The SAS managed to withdraw, dragging Vernon with them to the beach. The only person missing was Colonel Gresnick. He was presumed dead or captured.

I saw her, thought Vernon. Lucy in the flesh. It's not a dream. She looked normal, healthy, just like she used to be.

The Swiss Guards must have caught the survivors of the accident on the beach. Now, if your guess was right, he was on a ship.

"You're with your friends," Kruger said. "You're hurt and have a lot of cuts, but we've bandaged you up and you're going to be fine."

Kruger started talking about how much he admired the SAS soldiers - to be able to put up a fierce firefight after being involved in an accident like that.

Remarkable, he said, especially after what they had seen seconds before.

"What did they see?" Vernon asked. He groaned as pain ripped through his ribs as he tried to adjust his position.

"Later," said Kruger. "Now, I need you to think very carefully about something. I'm sure you know that my men

and I work for the Vatican. Lucy Galahan was under our protection. The Delta Force unit... were you stalking?" "

'How do you know about them?

Kruger smiled. "The Vatican has the most efficient intelligence network in the world."

"Where are we going?" Vernon began to panic. They may be heading away from Lucy. This was not good. They had to find her, save her.

"We're on a ship on the way to Bristol. I don't know how much you know about all this, so it may sound strange, but we're sure the deserters will take Lucy to sites linked with King Arthur, just as we plan to do. Tintagel was our starting point, but we weren't sure what came next. We were waiting for Lucy to work it out for us, but now

we have

you in your place. "

"We need to go back," Vernon groaned. 'Follow the trail of the deserters.

"We can't go after them. We were lucky to escape Tintagel with our lives.

Kruger turned. “Most of us, that is. We had to leave our captain behind.” He stood up, walked over to one of the lookouts, and looked out. "I hate shooters," he said. 'Snakes'.

"We can't leave Lucy behind." Vernon was practically screaming.

“We have no choice but to regroup. We need to work their next move, be one step ahead and surprise them.”

"As?"

'We have something to show you. We think we can use it to find out where they're going to take Lucy.

Vernon hated being in bed, feeling very weak. "This better be good."

Kruger gestured for him to get up. "Come and see for yourself."

Vernon pulled the sheets away and crawled out of bed. Only now did it occur to him how fortunate he had been. No serious injuries, no limbs

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missing, practically unharmed. “What happened to the helicopter?” he asked as he followed Kruger down a narrow hallway.

Kruger interrupted. "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes..."
'It was...' Vernon hesitated. It seemed so ridiculous. 'An angel? Kruger turned and looked at him.
'Wherever he came from, he was the brightest of all. "
'What?'
"He was the only one who could rival God himself. The most beloved, like a son."
Vernon shook his head. "I don't understand."
"In this world, he is the opposite. No light, only darkness, the most terrible darkness of all."

"You're not making any sense." However, Vernon understood perfectly. He had never seen darkness like that which

wrapped itself around the helicopter. A black hole. The perfect lack of light.

"You understand that these are the end times, don't you? That's why he
he appeared.
"For God's sake, tell me what you saw. What was it that attacked our helicopter?"
Kruger made the sign of the cross. When he responded, a shiver swept
through every cell in Vernon's body. 'Lucifer'.

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half of the soldiers in the truck were sleeping, while the others looked around drowsily. They probably took turns sleeping. Lucy noticed something had changed - the noise of the engines had disappeared. That's why she woke up.
She looked out of the small, uncovered section at the back. It was no longer night, but it was not clear what kind of day had arrived.
Mist covered everything.
The black soldier sitting across from her had his eyes closed, but she didn't think he was sleeping. His badge said he was Colonel Gresnick. Maybe he came with James, just like he said. It was notable that, of course, he was the only black one. These days, every American army unit had many black soldiers, but not this one. Every soldier here, besides Gresnick, was blue-eyed and blond. Were they a kind of racist unit, a pure white 'elite'?

'Everyone out,' a man shouted, and all the soldiers began to climb out. One soldier walked past Lucy and looked at Gresnick.
'Wake up, Sleeping Beauty'. He kicked the colonel's feet.
Gresnick opened his eyes and looked at the soldier. When the colonel got up, the soldier grabbed him, turned him around and forced the handcuffs on him. He was pushed out of the truck at gunpoint.

Lucy followed and descended to the floor. For a second, she felt invisible: no one was paying attention to her. Some Messiahs. One of the

Soldiers began handing out food and drink from a large carry-on suitcase — boxes of orange juice and elusive energy bars.
She chewed at her bar, and with each bite, I felt more alone. She wanted to talk to

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somebody. What was that strange noise last night? Had no one else felt the strange presence outside? Was he following her? The mist was not like any she had seen before. It had a strange orange coloring and a surreal quality. But that was true of everything these days.

As they breakfast, the fog gradually lifted. Someone muttered something about how beautiful the new dawns were now. New dawns? She gasped when she saw the sky. It doesn't even contain a trace of April blue. It was red, like blood. Now she understood the strange comments she had heard the nuns making lately, why they had stopped taking her out, why they had boarded up the windows throughout the convent. They spoke of the world suffering from stigmata, of wounds across the earth bleeding, of natural resource catastrophes that reflect the corrupt state of humanity's soul. Lucy had imagined the bleeding sky. If it had started to rain, would blood have fallen?

If the whole world was like this, no wonder people thought the end was coming.

It was only when she studied the landscape around her that she realized she knew where they were. Everything had initially seemed strange because of the strange light from the sky, but now everything fell into place. The big giveaway was the hill a few hundred yards away, rising hundreds of feet above the plain - Cadbury Castle in Somerset. Like Tintagel, this was considered a possible location for Camelot. In fact, he had the strongest claim. If King Arthur existed, he was likely to have been a warlord living in the years after the Romans left Britain.

He would have been a leader of the native Celts, fighting against the invading tribes of barbarians from the continent - the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. Ultimately, he failed. This is why England was named after the angles.
What was certain was that Arthur was not a medieval king who lived in a big stone castle. All of England's monarchs were known in detail, and Arthur was not one of them. He lived before the time of kings, before the age of stone castles. This meant that Camelot, if there ever was a place, was wooden.
Archaeological studies at Cadbury Castle revealed that there was a wooden hill fort on top of the flat-topped hill. The stone castle at Tintagel could never have been Camelot, but the wooden fortress has long since disappeared, once here it fitted the historical profile perfectly.

Lucy took in the red-tinged scenery and let out a deep sigh. Cadbury Castle, surrounded by picturesque farmland, was breathtaking. Last time she was here, the fields were full of grazing cows and sheep. There were no animals now. A circle of trees surrounded the hill, while the plateau was empty apart from a small chapel in one corner. Despite its name, there was no castle visible to Cadbury Castle. Cadbury Hill would have been a better name. Earthworks were carried out around the highest level of the mountain,

a

remnants of the defenses of its Celtic inhabitants once built. There was little doubt thousands of people lived here. In its day, it must have been a glorious sight, a huge fortified hill dominating its surroundings.

Near Cadbury was the River Cam. Lucy had always believed that this was the most likely location of Arthur's final battle. Why did the soldiers bring

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to such a place? His mind searched for possible connections with other mythical
battles. The Jews spoke of an ancient and terrible battle in a place called Megiddo. They believed the same
location would one day host Doomsday's final battle between good and evil. It
was more familiar to people under its westernized name - Armageddon.

Camlann was like an echo of Megiddo. It was the battle that marked the end of ancient Britain, the end
of a way of life. Was that why they were here?
Was this the place where it would all end under a blood-red sky? She took a sip of orange juice, and tried to
remain calm.
Sergeant Morson emerged among the other soldiers. He was using a sword, the sword Lucy had found in
Tintagel. He must have seized it from Sinclair. “Is
everything okay?” he asked.
Lucy, tuning into his accent, realized how well spoken he was. Ivy League, she thought. She had encountered
that accent many times at Oxford and at international conferences. But there
was something even stranger. It wasn't just the sergeant who was Ivy League, all of his men were too. This
had to be the most unusual special forces unit ever - a group of Ivy League graduates, and
not a single black person among them, assuming Gresnick was telling the truth and was not one of them.

Morson looked at her in a peculiar way, almost as if he were looking at a famous statue in a museum, weighing
up whether it lived up to expectations.
'I don't think you're going to tell me what you want with me?' Lucy was surprised by how fearless she was.
When Captain Kruger did look out into the sea at Tintagel, she had never known fear like him. She doubted
she could be that scared again.

"Later," Morson replied. "We can't get our trucks any closer to where we're going, so we're going on foot."

'Where?'

Morson turned and walked away, giving orders to his men. They formed a column, with Lucy and Gresnick
wedged in the middle, and set off along a narrow path
surrounded by hedges. Lucy wondered where Cardinal Sinclair was and looked up and down the line
of soldiers. She saw him near the turn, looking sad, with his hands cuffed behind his back.

Lucy breathed hard. There was a delicious smell of lavender. It took her by
surprise, it was too early for lavender, and she doesn't think it grew here anyway. Was everything changing
somehow? She has always loved the Somerset countryside.
Even now, in the sickly light, it still looked like an idyllic rural setting, full of meadows and orchards.

After making their way past several fields, they found the track fading and were confronted by a
vast field of dandelion clocks.
When she was a child, Lucy loved blowing her hair off and making wishes. Why, there were many of them
that were frightening. It was as if nature had begun to produce. Growth cycles are becoming shorter. A
more fertile world in its final hours?

A gust of wind blew past them. All the dandelion seeds lifted into the air, creating a wave that resembled a
snowstorm in one of these shake-em-ups.

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about children's toys. She looked at the swirling white clouds. They had one hypnotic quality. Was everyone like this? People could become addicted to dying worlds, the last thing, couldn't they?

"Come on," Morson shouted and they crawled across the field until they reached the bottom of the slope.

The last time Lucy was here, she took James for a picnic in a small forest clearing on the hillside. She told him about the history of this hillfort, about how the Romans came here in the 1st century AD, destroyed the fort and slaughtered its entire Celtic population - men, women and children. Arthur supposedly rebuilt the fortifications four centuries later, and created a beautiful palace in the center of the hill's flat top. Even now, the plateau was known as King Arthur's Palace.

They followed a winding mud track through the forests, with steep banks on both sides. The trees looked much darker than he remembered. Almost sinister. The forest was named Ravenswood. After the destruction of the fort, thousands of crows began to live in the trees. For centuries later, people were afraid to come here.

Lucy felt something poking her elbow. She turned around and found Gresnick looking at her. He pointed upwards with his eyes. She tilted her head up.

In the upper branches of the trees were thousands of crows, neither moving nor making any sound. They simply looked. She had never seen so many together before. The birds of death. She always thought it was terrible. She recalled stories of ravens darkening the sky as they descended on battlefields to eat the rotting flesh of the fallen. It was the surest sign of coming disasters.

The entire group moved silently, as if afraid to make any sound that might disturb the birds. Even though it was spring, all the leaves had fallen from the trees. Soldiers' boots crumpled in the decaying leaves.

Lucy breathed hard as they emerged from the trees. She prayed that she would never see crows again. They passed several ditches and large earthworks and finally reached the plateau. It was empty apart from the picturesque chapel in the far corner. His name was more unusual - St Gaius. Lucy had researched it for several years and discovered that it was named after a Roman centurion, Gaius Cassius Longinus, the soldier who stuck his spear into Jesus' side as he hung on the cross, to prove that he was dead. Some of the Savior's redemptive blood fell upon him and miraculously cured him of his failing vision. Soon after, Longinus left the army, became a Christian and was martyred. One legend claimed that he came to England in the same party as Joseph of Arimathea, meeting his death in this same place. Legend claimed he had all his teeth pulled out and his tongue cut out, but he was able to continue speaking clearly, praising Jesus until the moment of his death.

The story of Longinus and his spear fascinated Lucy for a strange reason - he thought he proved that Jesus was not dead before the spear pierced his side.

Impaling a body with a spear was the standard Roman custom to verify that it was killed on a battlefield. The dead have no heartbeat, no blood pressure, and so blood doesn't flow. However, in the Bible he clearly stated that the

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blood and water gushed from the wound in Jesus' side: impossible for a dead man.
She wondered why no one had pointed this out before, but when she checked the
internet, she discovered that there had been a years-long debate over this precise point.
Some people agreed with her that the spear, not the
crucifixion of Jesus killed. Others said that Jesus was actually dead, but the thrust
spear pierced the pericardium - the sac containing watery fluid that
surrounds the heart - and then entered the heart itself, from which blood could
conceivably surge even after death. Others have produced even more elaborate
medical explanations. However, the possibility remained that
Longinus was Jesus' real killer.
It would be a difficult trick to turn the Christ-killer into a saint, but that is exactly what
Longinus became. He was the man who ensured that the
scriptures were fulfilled. Jesus was crucified on Friday and the Jews
Saturday is on the Sabbath. It was unholy for executions to take place on Saturday, so the
traditional remedy was to make sure that all crucified men died
on Friday. The usual method was to break their legs so that they would be
unable to support their weight, their lungs would collapse under the pressure, and
they would die of asphyxiation. High Priest Caiaphas intended this fate for Jesus.
But the scriptures made two unequivocal statements about the Messiah: "Not one of
His bones will be broken" and "They will look upon Him whom they have pierced."
If Jesus' legs were broken, it would prove that he was not the prophesied Messiah.
Likewise, if he was not smitten, he was not a Messiah. Longinus solved both problems.
Some people claimed that while he held the spear Longinus he controlled the destiny
of the world, and that all those who wielded it afterward also held destiny in their hands.

Lucy and the soldiers marched across the grassy plateau to the old chapel. The view
was spectacular, somehow enhanced by the garish red light. Lucy wondered if the sky
was red like this when the battle of Camlann took place, if King Arthur looked up and saw
a scarlet sun.
It was obvious they were heading to the chapel, but why? Were they on some kind of
pilgrimage? What possible meaning could St. Gaius
Longinus have for these Delta Force deserters? Something clicked.
Lucy realized it wasn't St Gaius they were interested in. It was his spear.

ucifer? - You can't believe the ship was being tossed about like a plow through choppy
waters. Vernon stuck his hands against the walls
to steady himself.
"So a lot of people are in denial," Kruger retorted. "When will they realize this is really
happening? Only miracles can save us now.
Vernon looked at Kruger. The signs that the world was ending were
actually everywhere. On some level, he was convinced it was true, but still he refused to
acknowledge it as an absolute fact. There had to be rational explanations for all of this,
scientific solutions that could be implemented in a short space of time by smart people to
save the day. It couldn't be whole, it just couldn't. And the global crisis could not, should
not, have origins

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supernaturals. The idea of the Devil being behind was unthinkable.
"The helicopter was caught in turbulence. Vernon weakly waved his hand. "A swarm of birds hit
the rotor blades. Desperately, he tried to construct explanations, but each died as it
left his mouth.
Lucifer. Was it possible that the inmate in the detention cells had not transformed into an angel, but
the ultimate demon? Then the Lord of the Flies, Beelzebub,
the Prince of Darkness had tracked him all the way to London. All the old, terrifying
names flooded Vernon's mind. Nothing was darker than that thing that had appeared in the sky in front
of the helicopter. Perhaps the creature had taken Sergeant Morson with him, outrunning a helicopter.
What are the rational rules you can apply to the irrational world of the supernatural?

"You know it's true," Kruger said. "You saw it as clearly as I did."
"I dont know what your saying." Vernon turned. "I didn't see anything. It was very dark.
"Come with me." Kruger took a few steps along the narrow hallway and opened a door.
He disappeared into a room.
Just as Vernon was about to follow him, the lights in the hallway flickered. He stopped and listened.
Over the vibrating sounds of the engines, he heard the howling wind. The sound was terrifying,
like thousands of creatures
barking. Orchestrated by Lucifer? The ship was creaking and rocking.
"The state is your soul in?" Kruger said as Vernon joined him in a large, wood-paneled dining room.

Vernon didn't respond. How could he answer a question like that? He looked instead at a
projector sitting on a table, pointing at the wall. He guessed it was the same projector that he
noticed the accounting SAS soldier at Lucy's convent.

'What are you doing here? " he asked.

Kruger went to one of the small portholes and looked out. "God works in mysterious ways, his wonders
to perform." He explained that one of the SAS survivors had insisted on salvaging the projector from the
helicopter wreckage, despite the fighting going on around him. "The officer said he was given specific
instructions by someone named Colonel Gresnick.

I knew, I knew. It was obvious to Vernon that Gresnick was pursuing his own agenda. 'What
does Gresnick say? " he asked.
"He told all the SAS men to look for anything unusual in the convent. He said he was particularly
interested in strange paintings, parchments and books. Above all, ancient objects such
as swords, cups, plates and spears.
The Hallows Grail! Did Gresnick seriously think that they somehow found their way to Lucy's convent?
Why hadn't I discussed this with him?
As for the photos, does Gresnick mean Lucy? There were dozens of them.
Kruger turned and pointed to the back of the room. A collection of amateur paintings was pinned to
the wall, all showing a female figure against a blue
background. Lucy's paintings.
"The officer said he picked it up a little behind the headboard of Lucy's bed," Kruger explained.

They had large fold marks on them. The officer must have simply folded them and stuffed them
inside his jacket.

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The ship was struggling in heavy seas, and Vernon again had to hold on to prevent the front from collapsing. The engines seemed much louder, working overtime.

Kruger pointed to a chair and invited Vernon to sit.
“It's not Lucy's paintings I wanted you to see, Mr. Vernon, but the slide that was inside this projector. My guess is that Cardinal Sinclair brought it from the Vatican to show Lucy.” He paused. "I suppose you knew the cardinal was in England.

Vernon nodded but was still surprised that such a prominent figure was involved in this given what was happening in Rome. Sinclair, according to the Second Vatican Council Number, was a strong favorite to become the new Pope.
Why would he jeopardize his chance, probably lose it completely, to be with Lucy? Was she that important?

'We met the cardinal at the convent with Lucy,' Kruger continued. 'He said he was on a special mission from Rome, just like us. "
"But you didn't know he was there, did you? And neither does he know about you.
Kruger didn't respond, but motioned Vernon forward.
Hours before, Vernon imagined, Lucy must have stood just like this, waiting for Cardinal Sinclair to show her slide. It was comforting somehow, like he was physically connected to her again.
'Lucy...she's fine, isn't she?' Vernon smacked the side of his head. "I mean up here."

"We didn't know what to expect when we arrived at the convent. It was difficult to imagine that Lucy could be of any use to us if she were mentally ill, but it was obvious immediately that she had made a good recovery.

Good recovery, Vernon muttered. He had begun to form a convenient theory that when Lucy let go was the first sign of her breakdown. If she was back to anything like her old self - My God, what would he do if she wanted to take him back? He would throw aside his wife and even his beautiful baby to be with Lucy again. It's not worth denying it. What kind of person did that do it? Selfish? Insensitive? Unfair? The fraud? Those were the least of it. A terrible husband, a terrible father, a man who broke the most sacred of vows.

No kind of hero. But to spend a few hours - perhaps his last - with Lucy, he was prepared to become the vilest of men. The price of love, he supposed.
Nothing is more guaranteed to bring a man down than love.
In his school days he had a special dislike of poetry. Only one poem ever made a good impression on him. La Belle Dame Sans Merci by Keats: The beautiful lady without mercy. An unidentified passerby asks a distraught rider who is wrong. The broken knight tells his weak tale. He loved a beautiful lady who abandoned him. Now, in the darkness of a great forest, he is disappearing, the will to live stolen from him by the mysterious beauty. All the birds in the trees stopped singing.

Even as a school child, even though he knew nothing about love, Vernon felt the knight's pain. Maybe that was the way poetry worked - he predicted your future. When Lucy dumped him, he entered the armor of that tragic knight.

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He was in the same iron prison, locked in the same strange, forest twilight, waiting like the knight for the birds to sing.
Kruger turned on the projector and an image of a stunning Renaissance painting appeared on the opposite wall.
Vernon looked at him in astonishment. He turned to look at pictures of Lucy on the wall behind, then looked back at the masterpiece in front of him. Almost involuntarily, he raised his hand and pointed to the central panel at the bottom of the projected image. “How?” he said, then fell silent.

t's a miracle, isn't it? Kruger's voice was full of admiration. 'What you are looking at is a five-hundred-year-old mural by Raphael, hidden in a secret vault in the tomb of Pope Julius II.
'But...' Vernon still couldn't take it in. He closed his eyes and shook his head.
That couldn't be.
"I can't even begin to imagine how this is possible," Kruger said. 'Lucy couldn't know anything about Rafael's mural. But just look at the dashboard. It's the first thing you look at because it's so out of place. It's certainly not Raphael's style. It is inconceivable that he painted something so amateurish. However, it is there. The impossible panel.
Vernon opened his eyes again, his gaze shifting to the small watchmen at the side of the room. The sea was breaking against the ship as if it was trying to break in. Even Cardinal
Sinclair wasn't supposed to know about this mural," Kruger said.
'What do you mean?'
"We were told that the Pope forbade him to look at it."
"I don't understand." Vernon was shocked. If the Pope did not trust the executor of Catholic doctrine, how can anyone be trusted? But perhaps there was more to it than that. Had Sinclair trusted the Pope? These Swiss Guards were on an extremely unusual mission. It stank, frankly. The Swiss Guard never left the Vatican. Could they be trusted?

'Wasn't Sinclair the Pope's right-hand man? "Vernon asked. "Everyone said he was a shoe-in to become the next Pope.
"The Pope is only allowed one other man to see the mural. My brother - Captain Jurgen Kruger.

'Is he here too?
'My brother is dead.' Kruger's face paled. 'He was the leader of this mission. A sniper fired while he was with Lucy on the cliffs at Tintagel. You arrived in your helicopter shortly after. "

ÿI'm sorry. It must be difficult for you.ÿ
"It's going to be difficult for all of us. My brother was an exceptional man. He always knew what to do. The rest of us are lost without him."
"What does your brother think Sinclair?
"He didn't trust him. My brother found the Pope's death highly suspicious.
'You can't be suggesting Sinclair had anything to do with this. The Pope was delivered a note with bad news and he suffered a heart attack. It's not mysterious. "

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"These are the strangest of times. Soon all our loyalties will be tested. This is when we will discover who we really are, what we truly believe in."

Vernon shuddered. He already went to find out who he was, and he didn't do much like what he saw.
"My brother believed in Lucy," Kruger said. "He gave us a detailed briefing on her before we arrived in England. We know you were her only serious boyfriend. As long as my brother could do, Lucy has never stopped loving you, despite what you may think. You are invaluable to us, Mr.

Vernon. Can you help us get Lucy back. '
Get Lucy back. That was all, wasn't it? Sergeant Morson said Lucy was the most special person in the world. When he first heard these words, Vernon thought they were nonsense. Now it was obvious how true they were.
He remembered one of the best days he spent with her. They sat in a

Bench looking out towards one of Cornwall's most famous landmarks - St Michael's Mount. It was a wonderful castle on a high hill, a couple of hundred meters from the sea, and could only be reached at low tide. It was such a beautiful day.
They sat for hours holding hands, talking badly. Then Lucy kissed him and told him how much she loved him. Was that the kiss of a Messiah?
She was his own Holy Grail. It was strange that she spent so much time thinking about it, writing about it, discussing it. When you became obsessed with something, did you become that?

But everyone wanted to have the Grail in their hands. Lucy was now the most precious of all. That was why Colonel Gresnick was so interested in her. He was another one who couldn't be trusted - the man who looked like a Hollywood star, and very well versed in myths and legends. He and Lucy couldn't doubt talking for months on end. He fascinates Lucy. Does she find it attractive? The answer was obvious.

Vernon's face turned red with anger. In his mind, he had an image of Gresnick kissing Lucy. However, the colonel threatened to kill her. There was no way the two could be together. Anyway, maybe Gresnick died in the helicopter crash. For a second, Vernon felt a shiver of relief. Then he was horrified at himself. He felt himself becoming capable of the worst things.

'What do you think of the painting? Kruger asked. "What do you say?

Vernon shook his head. "I'm no art expert." He had to raise his voice because the entire ship was vibrating. "It's a kind of narrative. A lot of it seems pretty conventional. You know, traditional Biblical scenes and the like. I don't know how King Arthur and the Grail fit together, though."

Kruger nodded. "My brother said that the Vatican had no idea how to interpret the mural until the Pope read Lucy's book. At the same time, he realized that what Lucy said about the Arthurian legends applied to the mural. It was coded reference to the claims of two competing religions. The Pope said that a time would come when the rival religions would collide head-on, with the fate of the world at stake. If the wrong choices were made, the world would perish.

"That's what the painting was showing - the human being ran condemned to hell for eternity, or saved and admitted to paradise. Pope Julius II believed that intended

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mural as a warning for what would happen if the Catholic Church should allow heresy to spread. By placing him within his own tomb, Julius II intended that other popes, coming to pray for his soul, should see him. As they considered their own mortality, they would see that the world itself was mortal. Everyone and everything was threatened by heresy. It was the greatest danger of all, because if humanity placed its faith in the wrong God, the true God would have no option but to eliminate his own creation. "

'Didn't you say it was a secret vault?

'Secret to all but other popes. They just had access. We don't know what Julius II's immediate successors thought of this, but we do know that Pope Marcellus II was shocked when he saw him in 1555. He died just 22 days after becoming pope, and some have said the cause was his horror. upon seeing the mural.

"And what happens to Lucy? Vernon asked.
"The Pope asked questions about her. When he discovered she was a Catholic, he held a special mass in St. Peter's Basilica to give thanks.
Vernon didn't know how to react to this. It was true Lucy was once quite a devout Catholic, but she ceased to be strong after her mother died, and it became obvious that she was quickly heading towards atheism. On top of that, she was always fascinated by the Gnostics, and once said that their ideas made more sense than Christianity. If anything, she was in a religious no man's land. The Pope had made a terrible mistake if he believed that Lucy was automatically on the Catholic side.

'He was certain that God chose her to save humanity," Kruger continued.
"When he learned from the convent's mother superior that Lucy was painting pictures, he asked for photographs of them. When he discovered that she had painted a picture identical to the one in Raphael's mural, he took this as proof that she was the Chosen One.

Vernon looked at the floor. More and more, it seemed to be true. Even the Pope thought so. Could it be possible that the fight was fought for Lucy's soul and the outcome will determine the fate of Earth?
"What are the two competing religions?" he asked, but he already knew the answer - Christianity versus Gnosticism, two religions that could not be more different. A believer in one was the automatic enemy of a believer in the other.
Kruger gave a half smile. "You've already read Lucy's book. You know the answer.
The answer? Vernon had nothing but questions on his mind now. Despite everything I knew about the Gnostics, it was still difficult to accept just how radical their beliefs were. To replace the Christian struggle between good and evil with the Gnostic struggle between spirit and matter involved a whole new mentality. Sins and crimes do not matter. What mattered to Gnostics was gaining spiritual knowledge that allowed the soul to escape the material hell they were trapped in. Strangely, some Gnostics claimed to revere Jesus Christ and still called themselves Christians, but the Christ was nothing like the Christian. They did not believe that he was ever physically incarnated as this would mean he became part of the evil material world. So, they denied the reality of the crucifixion.

It was impossible to crucify Jesus because he did not have a physical body, so the crucifixion scene was a ghost. Interestingly, Muslims believed exactly the same thing. His death, according to them, was nothing

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but an illusion to deceive his enemies. Not so much crucifixion as crucifixion.
Since Jesus did not die, neither was he resurrected. Since he does not have a body, he could not be part man and part god. The Gnostics denied the Catholic belief in transubstantiation. This was impossible, they said, because Jesus would never become part of the evil physical world in any way. To them, Jesus was a divine messenger from the realm of true light, his task to preach love, peace, compassion and forgiveness - all things that the Lord, the creator of the material world, despised.

The Gnostics all revered who opposed Jehovah. Lucifer, as Jehovah's great enemy, was his hero. To them, Lucifer's identification with Satan was ridiculous. Satan, evidently, was Jehovah.

If the Gnostics were right, everyone was wrong. The human race, worshiping the creator of the material world, had made the gravest conceivable mistake. Humanity had spectacularly misunderstood the nature of life, of the world, of reality. And thus he was condemned to eternal hell.
If, as Kruger insisted, Lucifer really existed and had come to earth, did that prove the Gnostics, or the Christians, right? Was this why the weather was so turbulent, why so many disasters were happening? - The planet was preparing for the final apocalyptic fight between Lucifer and Jehovah. Although Vernon was desperate to be on the side of good, he was no longer sure which side that was, and he suspected Lucy was equally uncertain.

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Just looking at one of the panels on the left side of the mural, Vernon recognized something. When Sergeant Morson looked at him after the helicopter crash, he noticed that the sergeant wore strange insignia on his uniform. In a line, above the breast pocket, were four different emblems.
One showed a blue swastika on a white background, one a red rising sun on a white background, one a silver skull and crossbones on a black background, and the final emblem was black and white, divided into two halves, black above white. .

These exact emblems were displayed on the panel in front of Vernon. When he pointed at Kruger, the Swiss soldier was not surprised.
"These emblems are Gnostic symbols. The blue swastika on a deep white background was the flag of the Gnostic sect, the Cathars. The symbolizes the Rising Sun which the Gnostics believe in the universe of light of the true God. The skull and crossbones is a symbol that the physical world is a place of darkness, decay and death.

"And it's one of the flags used by the Knights Templar," Vernon said, remembering what Gresnick told him.

Kruger nodded. "You are well informed. In that case, you probably know what the room is."

Vernon looked at the black stripe on the white. He had no idea.

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Kruger looked at him. 'No? Vernon shrugged. "This is called a Beauseant," Kruger said.
"It is the most sacred banner of the Knights Templar. It shows that, in the hellish world in which we live, darkness triumphs over light. The Templars' task, once they saw it, was to fight their way through the darkness to the light. "
"So, you think the Templars were Gnostics?" That's why the Pope
dissolved the Order. The Templars were planning to overthrow the Catholic Church. Their preparations were well advanced.
Ready? The word echoed in Vernon's head. What preparations had
Kruger made for Lucy? “Where do you plan to take Lucy?” he asked. "Pomegranate?

Kruger turned. "It's no coincidence that the defectors are Americans," he said after a time.
'What do you mean?'
'You're not Catholic, are you Mr. Vernon? "What does this have to do with anything?
"If you were a Catholic, you know that the Vatican has always opposed Freemasonry. If you knew American history, you would know Freemasons founded America.
Virtually everyone who signed the Declaration of Independence was a Freemason. Paul Revere, the man who rode to warn the Boston colonists that the British army was coming, was a Freemason. The general the Americans chose to lead their army against the British was
George Washington, a Freemason. He was the first president, of course, and almost all The subsequent presidents were overtly or covertly Freemasons.

"In fact, the first non-Masonic president confirmed was JFK, a Catholic, and he won by just a handful of votes. The Freemasons tried everything to stop him, but Kennedy's father knew how to fight
back and he mobilized a huge political machine to harness the votes of every immigrant Catholic - Irish, Italian, Polish, Hispanic, and so on - to have his son in the White House. It wasn't the
Cubans or the CIA or a lone madman who killed JFK, it was the Freemasons. Who replaced JFK? LBJ - a high-ranking Freemason. When nothing terrible happens on the world stage you should ask cui bono? - For whose benefit. The Freemasons were the ones who profited from Kennedy's death.
They killed RFK too, and Martin Luther King." This is ridiculous. You have no proof.

"Mr. Vernon, the Catholic Church has been waiting a long time for America to wage a war of aggression against the world. When the war on terror began, it was no surprise to the Vatican. It was only a matter of time before the Freemasons have made their move. When you hear the word "neocon", you should translate it as Freemason. Their plan is to dominate the world, and to make their Freemason God, the universal God of the earth.

'You can not be serious. This is crazy conspiracy stuff.
'But there is a conspiracy. There always has been.' Kruger turned and pointed to the panel showing a pyramid with an eye on top. 'Haven't you seen this before? "

Vernon did think he looked familiar, but he couldn't place it. "It's one of the most
powerful symbols in the world. You see it everywhere, all the time."

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Vernon shook his head. "I'm sure I've seen it somewhere, but I just can't... it's so familiar." "It's familiar because it's on the back of the US dollar. And on the back of the official Great Seal of the United States of America. It's the symbol of the Illuminati secret society, whose sworn mission is to overthrow the Catholic Church. You'll hear all kinds of strange theories about the Illuminati - that they started as a group of disaffected scientists in Rome in the 1500s, that they were formed from the last survivors of the Cathars and the Knights Templar, who were black magicians and worshipers of Lucifer. I have I've even heard a theory that the Illuminati are reptilian aliens wearing human disguises.

"But the Catholic Church believes it is the oldest and most sinister secret society on earth and arose long before the advent of Christianity. They are at the root of all attempts to subvert Catholicism, which, for them, was the institution created by their satanic enemy to crush them. The Illuminati created the Cathars, the Knights Templar, the Alchemists, and the Freemasons. The Protestant leaders Luther and Calvin were Illuminati, and the entire reformation was designed by the Illuminati. The Illuminati finally decided that they wanted to create an entire country, far from the reach of the Vatican, that would turn out to be the most powerful nation on Earth, capable of challenging the Catholic Church once and for all."
'America,' Vernon muttered.
"Exactly. America is the Masonic heart of the world, every part of it created by Freemasons, all of its laws created by Freemasons, almost all of its leaders Freemasons. The Declaration of Independence is a Freemason document par excellence. Without the knowledge or consent of the majority of its people, the American Freemasons have been pursuing a relentless Masonic agenda since the country's creation. America's top politicians, lawyers, businessmen, military men, spy chiefs, police officers, doctors are all Freemasons. It is almost impossible to rise to any position of real power in America if you are not a Mason.And behind the Masons is that even darker organization, the ultimate puppet masters - the Illuminati.

"If you look at the pyramid on the Great Seal of America, you will see that it contains two inscriptions in Latin. Annuit Coeptis means: God has favored our undertakings, and Novus Ordo Seclorum means: A new order of the ages."
"The new world order," Vernon muttered.

Kruger nodded. 'They want to sweep away the old world where the Catholic Church dominates and replace the Catholic God with their Masonic God. "He again pointed to the pyramid painted by Raphael. "You see that the cornerstone has not yet arrived at the pyramid. Which symbolizes that his plan is not complete, and will be completed only when the Catholic Church is destroyed. The eye in the center of the capstone is that of the God of the Illuminati. Some call it the All-Seeing Eye, others refer to it as the eye of Horus. For those who oppose the occult, it is simply the evil eye.

James shivered as he looked at her. MI5's old crest was a cornerstone of the pyramid, and the symbol at the top was undoubtedly an All-Seeing Eye, there for the unlikely reason of representing the "I" in MI5. Was there a more sinister reason? Even the modern MI5 crest was dubious - containing five-leafed red roses and five-pointed green cinquefoils which, if you look

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up close, they looked suspiciously like black magic pentagrams.
"On the back of the dollar, on the other side of the pyramid," Kruger passed, "is America's national bird, the bald eagle. But in fact, it is a disguised version of another of the Illuminati's most sacred symbols - the Phoenix The Illuminati believe they are like the Phoenix because no matter how many times the Catholic Church tries to eliminate them, they always rise from the ashes.

"If you examine the so-called eagle, you will see that the right one has thirty-two feathers - the number of degrees common in Scottish Rite
Freemasonry, the origin of modern Freemasonry. As for the left, it has thirty-three feathers to represent the Thirtieth Third Degree of the Scottish Rite which is conferred on individuals for services relevant to Freemasonry. The stars above the eagle's head form a hexagram. This is one of the most potent symbols of the occult. The Illuminati was the power behind witches and wizards , just as they were after alchemy, black magic, and all the occult arts. Their mission, at all times, was to find ways to attack Catholicism, to undermine it, and open the way for the Illuminati to replace it. "

Kruger took a book from a shelf and placed it in Vernon's hand. Pointing to a prominent passage, he said, “Read this.
Vernon turned the book to the light and read the passage:
'Not only were many of the founders of the United States government Freemasons, but they received aid from a secret and August body existing in Europe, which helped to establish this country for a peculiar purpose. and special known only to a few initiates. (Manly P. Hall, The Secret Teachings of All Ages, pp XC and XCI). '

"Manly Hall was one of the 20th century's greatest experts on Freemasonry," said Kruger. "The European "secret and august body" was the Illuminati. Only the highest-ranking Freemasons knew this. The "peculiar and special purpose" was the final overthrow of Catholicism.

"For more than two centuries, the Vatican anticipated an attack by the Illuminati of America, but the Illuminati surprised them by taking advantage

from the economic chaos of a powerful European country to seize that nation and use it to begin the attack against the world. Then something surprising happened. Instead of attacking Catholicism, they launched the most savage attack on their other ancient enemy -. Of the Jews 'You're talking
about Nazi Germany, aren't you?'
Kruger nodded. 'Hitler and his main cronies were taking the Illuminati followers. Some said that Hitler was the supreme Grand Master, having complete authority over the American branch of the Illuminati.
"If that were the case, why would Hitler declare war on America?"
'The American Illuminati were crippled by the Wall Street crash, temporarily losing a great deal of their wealth and influence. It took decades to recover. Hitler believed that the Jews intervened and seized most of the levers of power in America."

"Well, if America is once again under the influence of the Illuminati and they despise the Jews, why is the US such a slavish supporter of Israel?"
Kruger laughed. "Adolf Hitler detested the Soviet Union and firmly

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Bolshevism believed it was a Jewish conspiracy to destabilize the West.
After all, Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev were all Jews. However, Hitler signed a non-aggression pact with Stalin before World War II began.
'The Israeli-American link-up is another unholy alliance. Anti-Semitism was common in America before World War II, and beneath the surface, it is still there.
There was simply no good reason for the US to support the new State of Israel in 1948. Many renowned American politicians, including Secretary of State George Marshall and most of the State Department, were horrified, for reasons of simple logic, that the United States has already recognized Israel.
Marshall, one of America's most prominent politicians and military men, and the man credited with reshaping postwar Europe, resigned the following year.

"What has America ever received from this relationship other than endless problems, and hostility from every Muslim country on Earth? In foreign policy terms, it is the most incomprehensible decision ever reached. No rational person would deliberately antagonize 1.5 billion Muslims to support few million implanted settlers in a small distant country. Hitler would certainly have claimed that it was precisely because of the power of the Jews in America that this decision was made. Afterwards, as the Illuminati regained strength, it suited them to maintain the status quo and served to to throw the rest of the world off the scent of the Illuminati's grand conspiracy. Furthermore, the Illuminati are no friends of Islam. The Pope was not fooled for a second, though. The Vatican saw through all of this from the beginning." .

Vernon was a conspiracy theorist. The problem was that Kruger was worryingly convincing. It was impossible to think of a single way in which America had benefited from its relationship with Israel, and easy to list a hornet's nest of problems.
So if there was no rational foreign political justification for this, there had to be a hidden agenda.

"Let's go back to Hitler," Kruger said. "Only he and twelve of his companions knew the full history of the Illuminati. It was said that there was a secret doctrine that involved a clandestine mission, the nature of which was so diabolical that it was revealed only by a handful at the highest level of the Illuminati. The Pope said that the Nazis tried to carry out the mission in the early years of World War II, but failed for some unknown reason. The Illuminati then spent the following decades trying to figure out what went wrong. Now, the Pope believed, the Illuminati had solved his problems and were about to try again. This time, he feared his plan was perfect.

And he turned to his Swiss Guard to stop them? "That's right."
"He put immense trust in you, didn't he?"
"We swore we would give our lives to ensure the success of this mission." "I want to know exactly what your mission is."
"The Pope told us that he knew the exact day that the Illuminati would make the final strike. He said it was written in the center of Raphael's painting.

Vernon saw several small Roman numerals: XXX - IV - MMXII. He made a quick conversion: 30 - 4-2012. "God Almighty. April 30, 2012.

Kruger nodded. "Two days away."
Vernon was there, frozen, trying to take her in.

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'The Pope was convinced that he knew what the Secret Doctrine was,' said Kruger. 'He believed that the Illuminati were the founders of Gnosticism and that the Gnostics' central belief – that the material world is evil – was the key to the Secret Doctrine. He thought it went far beyond a mission to destroy the Catholic Church. He came to the conclusion that it was nothing less than a plan to destroy the world itself. He believed that the Illuminati had found a weapon of destruction in mass so powerful it could blow up the planet."

Vernon thought about returning to his Cainite destination. Everything Kruger said assembled. This was becoming terrifying.

"You have to understand that my soldiers and I are men of faith," Kruger said. "Like the Pope, we do not believe that any normal man-made weapon can destroy the planet, but we know from the Bible that there is a weapon described there that has incredible, perhaps unlimited, destructive power.

'The Ark of the Covenant. "

"Exactly. We believe the Illuminati spent millennia searching for the lost Ark and now they have found it. We think they know how to activate it and make it unleash maximum destruction.

"But it was blown up a few hours ago, in front of the White House. Someone used it to assassinate the president.

'What are you talking?'

'I saw him live on TV.

Kruger shook his head. "I don't know anything about this, but what you saw was not the real Ark. Solomon created a replica of the ark and hid the

true ark under the Temple to protect it. The fake Ark was stolen from the Temple by Solomon's son, thinking it was real, and taken to Sheba - modern Ethiopia.

"Let's say you're right. Where does Lucy fit in?" Lucy is a unique person, Mr. Vernon.

'You don't need to tell me that'.

"You don't understand. The most detailed trace of Lucy's ancestors has been accomplished. We discovered something surprising about her. Everything you may think you know about her, you have no idea what Lucy Galahan really is. "

41

ucy had always considered St Gaius's chapel a peculiar place. It looked hundreds of years old, but in fact only the altar and its surroundings were ancient, dating back to 1150 AD, when the Templar Order built the circular chapel in their traditional style. When the Templars fell into disgrace, so did the chapel. Local farmers confiscated much of the stone for building walls and porches in their fields.

According to the tourist brochure available in the chapel's entrance hall, an anonymous benefactor with a particular interest in ancient Templar churches, rebuilt after the Second World War. He rebuilt it in the original style, and provided funds for a long-term caretaker, which was nowhere to be seen today. The brochure paid special tribute to the beautiful stained glass windows

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showing the Stations of the Cross, the most emblematic incidents of Christ's last hours on earth. The chapel was never actually used for religious services because the Catholic Church refused to consecrate it because of its Templar connotations, and there were not enough venues in this rural locality to provide a congregation anyway. The whole thing was a vanity project, a pointless madness in the wilderness. Tourists were the only people I ever visited, and they were mostly just interested in the restroom facilities.

Sergeant Morson ordered two men to stand guard, then everyone went inside. The soldiers spread out on the wooden benches, some lying down and stretching. It was obvious to Lucy that they were staying for awhile.
Cardinal Sinclair and Colonel Gresnick, with their hands fisted behind their backs, were placed in the front pew on the left side of the altar, with Lucy in the right-hand pew. No attempt was made to restrict his movements. In fact, Sergeant Morson couldn't have been better for her. Interestingly, he offered to make her a cup of tea, but she refused. He showed no sympathy towards Sinclair, looking at him with cold eyes.

"What's our holy fool like?" he said. "All the prayers in the world won't save you now.
Sinclair did not respond. He just looked at the altar.

Morson stared at Gresnick but did not speak to him. Lucy felt that there was something between the two men. Because they were both Americans and both in the military? Or something racist? If the initial suspicion was correct and Gresnick was a double agent, he was doing his job well. She was quickly feeling that she could trust him.
She was allowed to go to the bathroom and, on her return, she found everyone sitting or lying around, trying to relax. She returned to her bench, wondering why no one was showing signs of urgency. Wasn't the world supposed to be ending at any moment?
When she looked around the ornate chapel with its peculiar carvings of mythical creatures, reminiscent of those at Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, she tried to discover the meaning of this place. The answer, she was still convinced, must lie with the Spear of Longinus.
In his book The Unholy Grail: The Secret Heresy, one of the central themes was the meaning placed on the Hallows Grail by the Cathars and the Knights Templar. She argued that these were essential elements in the heretics' most sacred ceremonies. In the past, she believed, the heretics had all of the Hallows Grail in their possession, but lost them one by one as Catholic persecution intensified and they ran out of safe hiding places for their treasures.
What if the mission of these Delta Force soldiers was to rediscover the lost Relics? Maybe they thought she had expert knowledge of where to find them. Was this the real reason they kidnapped? Maybe it was something else. Maybe it was more than the knowledge they wanted. Your intuition? Somehow, she managed to retrieve the sword hidden in Tintagel, literally pulling it out of a rock and demonstrating, if old legends were true, that she was a true leader. But a leader of what?

Kruger predicted that she would do something to remove all doubt about who she was. If he had been proven right? Was it all predestined? In your blood

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somehow your holy blood? Somehow, she was connected to these Hallows in ways she couldn't understand. The sword she found in Merlin's cave was no ordinary sword. As soon as she touched it, she knew it was one of the Relics, probably

hidden there by the Templars trying to hide their most precious treasures from the reach of the Inquisition.

The Spear of Destiny was even more special than the sword. Some people claimed that it existed on earth since the beginning of time, passing from one powerful dynasty to
the next. Another story says it was forged by the ancient Hebrew prophet Phineas to embody the power of God's chosen people. It came into the possession of Moses and he gave it to his brother Aaron. He was then passed down the line of Jewish high priests until the time of
Caiaphas.
On the Friday of Jesus' crucifixion, the temple guard, led by their captain holding the
Spear of Destiny, went to the mount of Golgotha to break Christ's legs as he was nailed to the cross.

Legend has it that Longinus thwarted his plan by taking the captain's Spear and pushing him to Jesus' side. The Spear then passed into the hands of the Romans and was used by Plautius, the general who commanded Emperor Claudius' army that conquered Britain. Centuries later, Emperor Constantine carried the spear in his victory over a pagan army at the Milvian Bridge, the battle that established Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. When the Visigoth Alaric sacked Rome in 410 AD, he took possession of the Spear, and it was then transferred to his illegitimate son Theodoric I. The Visigoths and Romans combined their armies in 451 AD to fight Attila the Hun at the Battle of Chalons . Theodoric led a heroic cavalry charge, but after losing his grip on the spear, he fell from his horse and was trampled to death. Despite his death, the allies were victorious, the battle proving to be the last major military operation ever undertaken by the Western Roman Empire.

The Spear next resurfaced in the decisive Battle of Poitiers in 732 AD, when the Frankish commander Charles Martel stopped the Muslim hordes and saved Europe from succumbing to Islam. Decades later, it became one of the most powerful symbols of the Holy Roman Empire, being wielded by great emperors, such as Charlemagne, Otto the Great, Frederick Barbarossa. Napoleon, a high-ranking Freemason and the man who ended the Holy Roman Empire, attempted to take possession of the Spear after his spectacular success at the Battle of Austerlitz, but it was deliberately hidden from him, and some said it was because he was finally defeated at the Battle of Waterloo. Later, Hitler and General Patton were both obsessed with it, each being familiar with the legend that whoever possessed the Spear of Destiny would own the world.

Legend has it that if the owner of the spear or his minions should ever lose it, it would prove fatal. Charlemagne, successful in forty-seven battles with the spear, died soon after he accidentally dropped it. Emperor Barbarossa died seconds after the Spear slipped from his hands, when he was crossing a river with his army.
Two ravens that had accompanied him everywhere for years flew away just before he began the crossing, and apparently he knew at that moment that he would never make it across the river alive. Minutes after American soldiers found the Spear in Nuremberg, near the end of World War II, Hitler committed suicide in his bunker

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in Berlin. He could not know anything about the Spear's fate, but that was not how the Spear operated. He knew.
Lucy always thought the stories were complete nonsense. Now, she wasn't so sure. Maybe it was true, maybe the Grail Relics contained a power that could start and end empires, that controlled the personal destiny of whoever dared to possess them. She had never heard of any legend describing what would happen if all the Grail Hallows were gathered. Perhaps they generated a power unprecedented in human experience. Enough to destroy the world?

Was the Spear of Longinus the most potent Hallow Grail of them all? Some called it the Heilige Lance - Holy Spear - because of its religious connotations. Others said it was Lance the Reich because the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, the First Reich, revered it. Hitler wanted to make the Third Reich's most sacred relic. He believed that he was the guarantor of his historical destiny, the final talisman of the conquest of the world. If Lucy remembered right, the spear Hitler coveted so much was now in a museum in Vienna, back in exactly the same place from where he took it in 1938.

Then another thought occurred to him. What if those spears were fake? What if someone had replaced him at some point in its long history? Perhaps the real thing about the Hallows Grail disappeared from history and a replica took center stage. Is that why you brought her here?
Were they hoping she would find something she had lost a long time ago? The Spear Genuine Destiny?

42

Hatever was Kruger knew about Lucy, Vernon wasn't sure he wanted to hear it. He was already struggling to accept that the woman he loved was at the center of world events. He always found it exceptional, of course, it was still common as well. Outside of her academic life, she liked Smalltalk and gossip, watched junk TV, read trashy novels, liked to get drunk.

"Lucy is Seriah's only living descendant," Kruger said. "Who?"
'Seriah was the last high priest of King Solomon's Temple before the Babylonians destroyed it in 586 BC.

Vernon looked straight ahead. Priests and King Solomon's Temple?
Crazy to talk.
'The Book of Exodus makes it clear that the Ark of the Covenant only functions properly in the presence of a High Priest," Kruger stated. "The High Priests always came from a special lineage - the descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother. When her mother died, Lucy was left as the last of that sacred lineage."

"I had no idea, and I'm sure Lucy doesn't either."
“There was no reason for her to know. Things like that get buried over the centuries. Some secrets are simply too dangerous.
"Weren't high priests always male?
"The Vatican has documentary evidence that Aaron said the High Priest could be male or female as long as it belonged to his lineage. Moses was the one who insisted on a

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single male succession.

'Am I understanding this? Do Delta Force defectors think Lucy can operate the Ark of the Covenant for them?
'

Kruger nodded. "And by unleashing the power of the Ark, they believe they can destroy the planet."

"She'll never help them."
"The Pope agreed with you. He was sure that Lucy would turn the tide and harness the Ark for the good of humanity, heralding a golden age, a new Garden of Eden."

"Isn't there a simpler way to ensure the Delta Force defectors never make it?" Vernon hated saying those words, but there was no stopping them. 'Why isn't it your mission to kill Lucy?'

'What? I thought ...
Kruger turned to Lucy's paintings. "The Pope believes disaster was right if we perform an immoral action, even if the object was to save the planet. We must not do evil let good
come," he always insisted. He was strongly affected by Dostoevsky's novel The Brothers Karamazov. Dostoevsky poses the question that if a single creature has to suffer, especially an innocent child, is Creation justified? The Pope was tormented by this question. He thought, in the end, that suffering is an inescapable aspect of the human experience , but we must avoid unnecessary suffering, the deliberate infliction of pain. That was Christ's message. That's what the Ten Commandments were all about. Above all, unnecessary killing is never justified. Our mission was to find Lucy and protect her of the Illuminati. If not, death would no longer be unnecessary, it would be essential.'

"But why not take her straight to the Vatican? She'd be out of all this trouble right now.
"It's not that simple. If, as we believe, the Illuminati have the true Ark of the Covenant, there is no telling what will happen if they try to do the work for them. The Bible is full of terrible stories about what happened when people interfered with the Ark "

"But isn't it enough to say that the Ark was useless if someone of the right lineage wasn't there when it was used?
“I didn't say it wouldn't do anything. I said it wouldn't work properly. If the Illuminati messes with the Ark, they could trigger exactly the catastrophe we're trying to avoid.” The sea was lashing out furiously at the Kruger lookouts and looked nervously across the room. "The Pope was certain that the Illuminati had already tried to interfere with the Ark. He said it was no coincidence that natural disasters began across the world within minutes of the first reports coming in that the
Ark may have been found and taken. Ethiopian Ark was a hoax, but that doesn't mean the real one hasn't been discovered.'

"Do you really think that everything that happens in the world is caused by the Ark?
'What else could cause disturbances like this?'
"Global warming? Sunspots? Cosmic radiation?

"Don't be fooled by atheist scientists. They have no idea what's going on.

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All of this is far beyond your little realm of facts and logic. We are in the time of faith now.

"Lucy is some kind of bait? Is that why you don't take her back to Rome?
“I wouldn't say bait, but I don't deny that we want to use Lucy. To be more precise, we want her to lead us to the Ark. If we can recover it, the Illuminati will be finished forever.

"I don't care about any of that. I just want to find Lucy and get her out of this."

"With your help, we can achieve both goals." 'You really believe all this, don't you?'

'This is the final conflict, Mr. Vernon, the fight that was always destined to come: the Catholics and the Jews against the Illuminati. Lucy is a Catholic, but in terms of her lineage,
she is Jewish. His mother, and all of his ancestors on his mother's side were Jews. If she had lived in Nazi Germany, she would have been sent to the gas chambers. I must confess that the Pope was horrified when
he learned that Lucy might be connected to Jewish high priests. Caiaphas, the high priest in Jesus' time and the instigator of Christ's death, denied that Jesus was the Messiah, rejected Christianity, and persecuted the early Christians. The Pope was so disturbed that Lucy might have
any connection with the likes of Caiaphas that he sent one of us to Israel to check all the genealogical records of the High Priests. He prayed we wouldn't find a connection, but
we did. "

"So the note you received just before you died was confirmation?" Kruger nodded.
"But it doesn't make sense, does it? The Ark was always linked to the Jews, not Catholicism.

"Still, I can appreciate the Pope's concerns. It is God's will that Christianity replaced Judaism. Christians are the new chosen people. Why go back to the Jews who rejected Christ? Yet we are where we are. The Illuminati are our mortal enemies, not the Jews."

"If these Illuminati are so evil, why doesn't God destroy them? I mean, he didn't hesitate to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He practically drowned the entire human race in the flood.

"This is our third and final test, Mr. Vernon. 'I don't follow.
"The first test was in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve were told not to eat the forbidden fruit. They did, of course - of Original Sin. Later, humanity became so corrupt that God almost finished them off, sparing just Noah and his family. Now this. The third strike. Why shouldn't God destroy humanity? The Illuminati worships Lucifer. If it takes over, why would God stay a hand? He will certainly end this
charade once and for all .God will spare

us only if we stop the Illuminati. Otherwise, we will all die, Illuminati and non-Illuminati alike. "

“But you told me that Lucifer is here on earth. Doesn't that mean the Illuminati won?” Vernon pointed to Raphael's mural. “It's so obvious.
That painting tells us that the world ends in a couple of days and we must prepare for heaven or hell. We might as well give up now.
“There is always hope,” Kruger said. "It is possible that we are on the verge of

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something wonderful. "" What do you mean? '
"Think about it. We can use this situation to do something to rescue humanity forever, to permanently erase Original Sin."
"I'm not getting it from you.
"We can use the Ark to kill Lucifer.

ucy looked up and found Gresnick looking at her. She twisted around to see what the soldiers were doing. None of them were paying attention.

“Can I sit here?” he asked.
She shrugged, moved to one side and let Gresnick join her on the wooden bench. His hands were still fisted behind his back.
"I thought you were one of them," she said. "It means you're in uniform and you're American.

“I told you, I came with James.
Lucy tilted her head. 'I saw him back at the helicopter crash. I couldn't believe it. James and I...

“Was he hurt? I didn't see what happened back there. I have no idea who survived. It
was a mess.”
"I didn't get a good look. It was so dark.
"Did you see what attacked us? Did an RPG hit us? Everything went crazy. It was as if the night came alive.

Lucy passed uneasily. 'The dark shape enveloped your helicopter. There
It was a bizarre vibrating sound. I'm sure nothing was fired on you.
"I do not think like that." Gresnick tapped the ground with his foot. "I can't understand what happened."

'What are you and James doing?'
"Our mission was to find him and get him back to London. To safety.
Security? That seemed like such a foreign concept Lucy now. "I assume you went to the convent at Glastonbury first."
'Yes'. Gresnick started rummaging around. "If you don't mind telling me that, you're a lot more lucid than I was expecting."

Lucy turned to face him. She was surprised at how handsome Gresnick was, and even more surprised that she was even thinking about it. It was inappropriate in virtually every way. "So, you thought I would be
crazy?" She almost managed a smile.
"Given what has happened in the last few hours, I should be crazier than ever. The strange thing is that I
feel more acute than at any time in my life. Sometimes I don't know if it's really me. It's like someone is inside me, much stronger than I already was, someone who knows things I never did."

Gresnick raised his eyebrows.
'Mad, huh? It sounds bizarre, I know, but it's true. "
“I'm not doubting you, Lucy. We came to find you because we've heard things about you, incredible things.” He lowered his voice. "Yesterday, Sergeant Morson was in our custody in
London. He told us that you were the

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most special person in the world."
Inwardly, Lucy groaned. From every angle, she continued to hear these things.
Chosen Ones don't have to believe it themselves? If she wasn't convinced she
was special, why doesn't anyone believe her? She had no intention of staying on a
donkey and horse in Jerusalem. No one would put their palms in your way.
Whatever anyone said, she wasn't the Messiah.
Something Gresnick said didn't make sense. "So, you brought Sergeant Morson with you
from London? Did he escape from your helicopter?
'Sergeant Morson broke out of our cells in London. I can't explain how he did it. He had a
colleague who was suffering from horrible radiation wounds. That man escaped too.
Something bizarre was happening to him, some kind of
transformation. "" What do you mean? '
"Honestly, I don't know. Whatever it was, it wasn't normal."
Lucy nodded. This was true of almost everything that had happened recently.
"Listen," Gresnick said, 'I'm sure you've discovered a lot of vital things in the last few
hours. I have it too. We need to compare notes, to try to get the big picture. Whether you
like it or not, you are the key to everything that is happening.
We need to find out exactly how and why. Everything may depend on her.
"What were your requests if you could not save me?"
Gresnick couldn't hold his gaze. "I think there's something I should let you know," he
said after a long pause. 'James Vernon told me that, if he had to, he was prepared
to kill him.'

Evil Lucifer? Vernon shook his head. This was as absurd as trying to kill God. 'I just want
to find Lucy, that's all. "He tried not to look too

disregarded. He got up from his chair and walked to the back of the room to look at
Lucy's paintings. "You didn't give me a straight answer before. You didn't intend to
take Lucy out of the country, did you?"
"One way or another, everything will be resolved here in England," Kruger replied.
"My brother believed Glastonbury was the key, where Joseph
of Arimathea hid the Holy Grail in the first place. He said it was no accident Lucy was
living in a convent in Glastonbury. 'Are we going back to Glastonbury?'
"This ship is taking us to Bristol. My brother always thought we were likely to be
pursued. His plan was to make a sea voyage to take our enemies by surprise,
ensuring that no one could follow us. Fresh transport is waiting for us at Bristol, and it's only
a short drive from there to Glastonbury. Unless you have some other idea, that's
where we're going."
Vernon turned. I've been so stupid. If Lucy was everything people claimed she was, then
her life was closely connected with the Holy Grail.
Perhaps Gresnick was right and the Holy Grail was indeed hidden in Lucy's
convent. It should have occurred to him immediately that Lucy didn't end up at Glastonbury
by accident. She was obsessed with that place, dragging it there far more times than was
healthy. It was a beautiful city, but it suffered from severe TOD - tourist overload disease.
Every new age believer was convinced Glastonbury was the legendary Isle of Avalon, the

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Apple Island, where the mortally wounded King Arthur was taken after
his final battle. It was known that the land around Glastonbury was inundated centuries ago by
floodwaters from the Bristol Channel, meaning that the high ground may well have stood like an island in a
large lake in those ancient times.

He turned and looked at Raphael's mural. Something was wrong.
“We can't go to Glastonbury. That's not where the Americans are taking Lucy.
" He went over to the picture and pointed to the panels showing the Scenes
of King Arthur. "Look, we have just been to Tintagel where King Arthur was conceived. The next panel
shows the battle of Camlann where Mordred mortally wounded Arthur.

'Doesn't Lucy think Camlann was near Tintagel? Kruger asked. 'I think she said that in her book. "

'No, Slaughter Bridge was one of the possible locations for Camlann, but Lucy was convinced that the
actual location was elsewhere. "
'Where?'
Vernon pointed at the painting, but then his hand dropped. "I'm sorry, I don't remember."

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ucy stood up. "I want to be alone." She turned away from Gresnick, shaken by his suggestion. It was
impossible that James was ready to kill her.
There was no one on earth less likely to harm her than James.
Why did Gresnick lie?
She went to the bathroom and splashed water on her face. Looking at herself in the small mirror, she
found it difficult to recognize herself. At the convent, she found some mirrors. She hated her
reflection. To see her face was to see what life had done to her.

When she came out of the bathroom, Sergeant Morson was waiting for her.
"Come with me." He led her out of the chapel, and took her on a short walk to an observation point on the edge
of the hill. A clear view of the nearby River Cam is offered, tinged with the red of the sky.

"All things pass," he said. "Can you imagine King Arthur struggling there on the mud banks of the river,
Excalibur in his hand? The river that day must have
run red with blood.
As Morson spoke, it began to snow. Lucy imagined Arthur and his shining knights swinging their swords to the
bitter end as the blinding snow swirled around them, while their enemies closed in for the
kill. The flakes were a startling white against the dark red of the sky.

'Beautiful,' Morson commented. "No one could accuse Satan of not having an aesthetic sense. He is the
greatest artist of all, don't you think? No. No one knows how to manipulate
beauty like Satan. His understanding of humanity is unmatched. All our weaknesses are laid bare for him He
knows every button to press. That's why he has so much power over us.

Lucy suddenly understood who she was dealing with. The people who spoke of Satan in this sense could
only be one thing. "You are Gnostics, no

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you?

Morson smiled. 'You are so much, Lucy. You just haven't realized it yet. "
'I don't believe in any of these things. I mean, everyone says that Lucifer and Satan are the same person, but for you Gnostics, Lucifer is one of your most revered figures while Satan is your most hated enemy. Satan is Jehovah, the Creator, God, God, the Lord, Rex Mundi, the Demiurge or anything else you call him. "

Morson snorted. "How could Lucifer be Satan? Lucifer is the Angel of Light, standing on the right hand of the true God. Satan is the monster who tried to usurp the true God.
He was expelled from heaven, and in revenge he created this world of matter - hell itself. It says in the Bible that it took him six days to create hell, and on the seventh day Satan rested, satisfied with the abomination he had built. How can anyone worship the beast? How could they confuse him with Lucifer? Human history is full of wickedness, but this comparison is the most obscene of them all. "

“Are you going to kill me? This whole thing is building up to some kind of sacrifice, isn't it?
Am I being the lamb led to the slaughter?

'You keep confusing us for our enemies, Lucy. Sacrifice, animal or human, is repellent to us, but not to Satan, or Jehovah, whatever you want to call him. He always preferred blood and horror. We have all memorized the tale of Cain and Abel so that we never forget, for even a moment, the disgusting savagery of Jehovah.

Morson looked at the falling snow and recited a passage from the Bible: And Abel was a shepherd, and Cain was a husbandman. And he came to pass after
many days, which Cain offered, of the fruits of the land, gifts to the Lord.
Abel also offered of the firstlings of his sheep, and of their fat: and the Lord was attentive to Abel and to his offering. But for Cain and his offering he had no respect, and Cain was very
angry, and his countenance.
"You do not understand?" Morson said. 'Cain was a vegetarian who offered the Creator fruit and vegetables that he had grown by his own ingenuity and labor. But the Creator hated
such things. He wanted the sacrificial blood and gore that Abel offered. Right there, in that fatal preference, even the blind person should be able to see the truth. Cain is gentle, a farmer, his thoughts turned to the true God. Abel is a bloodthirsty savage, a murderous hunter, who feasts on
flesh and delights in slaughter. Who can doubt that

O
God Abel worshiped was Satan? 'But Cain killed Abel.

"It was self-defense. When Abel saw how contemptuous Jehovah was of Cain, he
took it as a sign that an even better sacrifice for the Lord was Cain himself. He pursued Cain, as if he were the prey he hunted every day, and attacked him in a small clearing. Cain managed to overpower him and use Abel's weapon against him. No murder was done. The only person with murder on his mind was Abel, beloved Jehovah.

Lucy wasn't sure how to respond. The story had a chilling logic. She had always found the tale of Cain and Abel problematic. Why does God despise the fruits of the earth? Why would he prefer animal sacrifice? It was stated as a simple fact, not apparently in need of any explanation. However, no

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Was it vile that God wanted things dead instead of growing to honor him?
In the name of God, hundreds of millions of people had been killed by the sword over the centuries. Does God's glorification of Abel and Cain's contempt show that it is exactly what he wanted? An arrogant, violent, blood-soaked, angry, and vengeful God? That sounded like a perfectly good description of Satan.

When Islamic kidnappers slaughtered thousands of Americans in the cruelest and sickest way, was it an act done in the name of a god of love and compassion? Or was the "Allah" of
these kidnappers a creature who feasted on human sacrifice, who bathed in blood and glorified the multiplication of pain and misery? Not Allah - Satan.

The Inquisition, the endless pogroms against the Jews, the Crusades, the massacres perpetrated by Muslims and Hindus in India, the Beslan massacre, the Moscow Theater siege, crucifixions, martyrdoms, beheadings, the burning of witches, the extermination of heretics, the endless litany of death, the sanctification of slaughter... all done in the name of God or Satan?

'You have no idea how special you are, do you?' Morson said. 'You're the last person in the world who would never do harm. We have all sworn to protect you. We would die for you.

Snowflakes floated around Lucy. “Stop saying that. It sounds crazy. You kidnapped me, that's the truth.”

'Lucy, it doesn't matter that you don't recognize how extraordinary you are. In fact, I'm
glad you don't. Imagine how insufferable you would be if you thought you were a Messiah. I assure you, the last thing the world needs is a second Jesus Christ."

"Tell me what you want with me.
"All in good time, Lucy. You feel like you've been kidnapped. The moment this business ends, you will understand that you are our guiding light. You who still don't see the clear path, but you, and then you will know that we have just taken into our custody for your own protection. There are people out there
that we wish to harm only. They will kill you without hesitation, if they have the chance. Those soldiers were with you before, they wanted to kill you. After A little persuasion, your precious
Cardinal Sinclair told us they were Swiss Guards and they had orders to eliminate you. Hardly
your benefactors. We are your family now, Lucy. You are one of us. You always have been."

"Stop talking in riddles.
"It would be wrong to burden you with the knowledge of what is in store for you, but, when the time comes, I have no doubt that you will know exactly what you must do. The future of humanity is in your hands .

Lucy twisted away from him, breathing hard. A thin layer of snow now covered the plateau, but everything was tinged red, as if the world were being viewed through some
bloody prism. Even his winter white uniform looked like a thin layer of blood was spray painted on it.
'Haven't you ever thought of your name, Lucy? Names are of fundamental importance. Take mine - Samuel Morson. Of course, Samuel could hardly be my real name. What would a Gnostic
do with a popular Hebrew name? But we

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We play the game, trying not to draw too much attention to ourselves. My Gnostic name is actually Sammael - one of the names for the Angel of Death. As for Morson, which means son of Mors. Mors was the Roman god of death."
Lucy looked at Morson's face, the face of a tough soldier. He must have seen a lot of action, witnessed death up close many times. He had those eyes that seemed to stare permanently into the distance.

“Your name has a lot of death in it, doesn't it?” she said. 'Hardly what one would expect from a follower of Cain given what you were saying.'

'Death in my name refers to a completely different kind of death: A glorious, desirable death that will free the entire human race"
"I don't understand."
Morson smiled. 'What is your opinion of Yehoshua ben Yosef? "Who?"
"Isn't it strange how so few people know the name of the god they supposedly worship? Yehoshua ben Yosef is the true name of Jesus Christ. Jesus is simply the Greco-Roman version of the Hebrew name Joshua. Joshua is itself an anglicized version of Yehoshua , and it means Yahweh is Salvation - no name could be more repellent to a Gnostic than that. As for ben Yosef, which means son of Yosef - Joseph. So Jesus Christ is good old Joshua, son of Joseph. Josh for your friends. Or maybe Yehosh."
He smiled and traced a smile in the snow with his boot.

"How long do you think Christianity would survive if all Christians were forced to call Jesus by his real name? How many Christians would kneel to Yehoshua ben Yosef? A few hours later, Christianity would fall.
Only by giving a Jew a Greco-Roman name was it possible for Gentiles to worship a Jew. The entire religion founded on a false name. It's almost funny, don't you think? "

Lucy thought of all her hours in church, praying, going to confession, seeking absolution. All in the name of Yehoshua ben Yosef?
Morson was right. It sounded strange, wrong. Does this mean she was anti-Semitic? Maybe, deep down, no matter how horrified she thought, that's exactly what she was. And when she was shocked or upset, she often said Jesus. It wouldn't work if she had to say Yehoshua.

'Take Christianity itself,' Morson continued, 'Now there is no other strange word. Christ comes from the Latin Christus. Which derives from the Greek Kristo, which means anointed. And that is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Mashiah. From mashiah we arrive at Messiah. Thus, Christianity is the religion of the worshipers of the Anointed One, the followers of the Messiah.
But Joshua Christ or Yehoshua Mashiah doesn't have the right ring, does he? They just don't cut it. No one would want to be that kind of Christian. Would they rather be Mashiasts instead? I don't think so. Perhaps they would rather worship a new Messiah - you, for example.

Lucy looked at the red-tinted River Cam making its way north.
Maybe she should have laughed at Morson's suggestion, but she didn't. "I don't have the right name either. There's nothing special about Lucy Galahan." You really have no idea, do you? '
"I'm at the bottom of the food chain. Nobody tells me anything.
'Lucy comes from lux, the Latin word for light. "MORSON'S eyes sparkled. "It's not

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no mistake you're called Lucy. Only light can defeat darkness. "He twisted his foot in the snow. "I love the snow. He renews the world, erases it temporarily away from the ugliness. The air is much fresher.

"But snow turns to mud, said Lucy. 'My name is just an accident. My father liked it, that's all.'

'There are no accidents. Have you ever been surprised that your surname is very similar to the name of one of the successful Grail candidates? "

'Galahad?

'He found the Holy Grail, and so have you.'

"I told you. It's pure coincidence about my name. 'Is that it? Your mother's name was Periperi, right? Periperi - a corruption of Perceval, another of the three knights who found the Grail.

Lucy felt her face flush. It had never occurred before. Periperi and Galahan. How could these names be a coincidence? There was only one other knight who found the Grail - Bors, the most common of the three knights. Maybe Morson was right.

Perhaps her destiny was to be a kind of female Bors. An ordinary woman destined to find the Grail, taking the names of the two most famous Grail Finders - Galahad and Perceval. “How do you know so much about me?” she asked.

"Nothing about your life is accidental. It is no coincidence who your parents were, what their names were. We have followed your life from the moment you were born.

Everything you have ever done is known to us."

Lucy's head throbbed. Her life, she felt, was being stolen from her. Others knew more about her than she did. If these people were looking at her the whole time, why weren't they watching her when her father jumped off a cliff? Why not help? Why not stop it? Why didn't they detect your mother's cancer? Big deal if they watched it. They certainly didn't help.

"Only one name is as special as yours, Lucy. My former captain's name is Lucius, the male equivalent of Lucy.

Lucy started to shake. She had an intuition. They were going to pair her with this Lucius, weren't they? A wedding? In this chapel? The unholiest alliance of all.

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Ernon was at the bow and looked out to sea. Kruger had told him to go get some air, to try to clear his head. The ship was some kind of pleasure battle cruiser painted gray. Kruger jokingly referred to it as the "Vatican Navy." The fog was descending over the Bristol Channel and it was almost impossible to see anything. The ship had been forced to slow right down.

The Kruger men were all sleeping in one of the lounges where tourists must have once laughed and chatted as they headed to some scenic attraction.

"March to the sound of guns", was the advice of an old military saying. Here, they were doing the opposite, moving away from Lucy.

Vernon thought it was ridiculous. He put his hand in his pocket, took out the

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cell phone and looked at the screen. On Signal. The entire network was probably down.
By now, the country's infrastructure must be falling apart. Fuel running out, highways blocked by abandoned cars, trains stopped. All the old certainties, all the conveniences of civilization, everything that had been taken for granted for so long, all gone.

"We have a satellite phone," said a voice.
Vernon whirled around and found Kruger behind him, looking pale and exhausted. This dim light made everything look worn. A disappearing world.
Everything slips, little by little, into oblivion.
"I spoke to the Vatican a few minutes ago," Kruger said. 'The Conclave is a stalemate.
There is no sign of a new Pope. How we need one at this time. It's almost midnight for humanity. " He placed his hand on his forehead. "The things that are happening out there... too much to bear."

'What do you mean?'
'All the volcanoes around Indonesia, called the Ring of Fire, erupted.
The eruption clouds are glowing red-hot and have merged into one, forming huge fiery ash, thousands of square kilometers in size. No one beneath it could have survived. Humanitarian agencies cannot get close.
"He bowed his head. 'The poorest people.'

It was obvious from Kruger's expression that there was more to come. "America has not been spared this time," he said. "What they feared most happened. Twelve
Category-5 hurricanes came together to form a superhurricane, more powerful than anything seen before on Earth. It ripped through the southern states of the US, and across Central America.

Everything in its path was obliterated. They are talking about tens of millions of deaths.
In the Canary Islands, after a volcanic eruption on the island of La Palma,
a piece of land slid into the sea, causing a mega-tsunami. This generated a wall of water about 160 feet high that crossed the Atlantic, devastating the Caribbean and most of America's southeast coast. All over the world there is famine, drought and pestilence.
It's as if the Horsemen of the Apocalypse came in person.

Vernon didn't know what to say. The words became nonsense.
"I'll show you to the satellite phone," said Kruger, tiredly, and led the ship to the bridge, where there was a special cabin for the satellite phone and an accompanying satellite dish. Kruger
turned and walked away, his shoulders sagging.

Vernon felt bad. This was already critical past. No matter what happened now, the world would never be the same. Given the severity of natural disasters, hundreds of millions were likely killed. Maybe billions by now. Anyone in distant locations who managed to
survive would not receive any help. In the day, they would be dead too. A long, slow death. No wonder the sky was red with blood. It was reflecting the scale of human agony.

He punched Commander Harrington's number, but wasn't confident of getting a line. The fog was as dense as he had ever encountered, and the atmospheric conditions had been poor that day, in any case. He was surprised when he arrived

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straight into a clearish line. Harrington looked tired, and not with it.
Vernon spent the first few minutes explaining the status of the mission, the loss of the helicopter and the fact that Lucy was now in the hands of the Delta Force Deserters.
Harrington didn't seem to have much of that in. His tone suggested he thought the whole thing was a waste of time.
“Things are bad here,” Harrington said. "We had no fuel deliveries.
No tankers hit the UK. The mainland's gas pipes were cut. We are quickly using the country's emergency reserves. In two days, we will not be able to provide any electricity and gas to domestic families.
We are expecting chaos. "There was a lot of weariness in his voice. 'Shit is happening all over the planet. Everywhere is affected. The estimated number of Dead Rising strongholds.
Scientists still can't agree on any course of action. The world is desperate right now. .No matter what, the DG wants you to continue'.

Vernon scratched his head. Grasping at straws came to mind. There were undoubtedly incredibly strange things happening on this mission, but could they really be linked to the devastation happening across the world? Kruger claimed Lucifer was walking the earth. In medieval times, no one would have demanded any explanation. Now, in the age of science, it was very difficult to credit. No matter the evidence from his own eyes, Vernon's mind wouldn't accept it.

"I have some information about the case," Harrington said. "I don't know how much using it will be for you, but you might as well have everything I have."

Vernon was surprised by what Harrington said next. "Let me be clear about this, Commander," he replied. "All these Delta Force guys are test-tube babies? Why the hell must that be?"

This revelation scared him. He suggested something cold and clinical, almost inhuman. As if this whole Delta Force thing was planned by mad scientists a long time ago.
"I've been told that test tube techniques make it easier to select a baby's sex," Harrington said. 'I guess it explains how your parents made sure they didn't have any female descendants.

'But why do women cooperate? Why don't they want to have girls? 'We can't second-guess people like this.

Harrington passed along new discoveries the DIA had made about the members of Section 5.
Apparently, each of them became immensely rich. The assumption was that he had managed to help himself to some of the treasure looted by the Nazis. Several of them became powerful industrialists, with a particular interest in mining operations.
One of its operations was the

Oak Island, Nova Scotia. They also had mining interests near Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland and Tara in Ireland, but their main interest was in the vicinity of Glastonbury. In each case, they had a license to mine for precious metals, primarily gold. Many of the world's best goldsmiths were on his books, but not one of those goldsmiths was willing to say what DAY they had been working. "Works of a religious nature for wealthy clients," was all they were prepared to say.

"As we were cleaning up the mess in the archives section, 'Harrington continued, "We

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We discovered additional notes from the 1945 interrogation of SS-Sturmbannführer Friedrich Velde, the author of The Cainite Destiny. Much more happened in his interrogation that was written into the official report. Velde was apparently optimistic until he was informed of Himmler's suicide. He demanded to know what Himmler's last words were. He was told that Himmler made wild comments in broken English. "All forgeries," said Himmler. "The real ones are lost forever.
It is finished.' "

"What were fakes?" asked Vernon.
'Nobody knows. But Velde's mood apparently changed immediately. He became extremely depressed. After ordering a glass of water, he made an inquiry about a fellow SS-Sturmbannführer named Hans Lehman. When he was told that Lehman was dead, Velde had some kind of adjustment. He made a comment about being the last of the priesthood. If he died, the Secret Doctrine would be lost forever.
"We found out that he didn't kill himself. In fact, he was desperate to live. Two Jewish officers forced the cyanide capsule into his mouth and murdered him.
Everyone saw the horrific footage from Dachau and Belsen concentration camps, so no one condemned the Jewish officers. The whole thing
was hushed up and made to look like suicide.
'The DIA discovered something else. The man Velde asked about - SS-Sturmbannführer Lehman - was one of the Nazi officers responsible for
looting treasures at Nuremberg. He wasn't really dead. It turned out that he was the person interrogated most frequently by the men of Section 5. In fact, they spent almost all of their time on him. He died ten years ago, in Great Britain. And listen to this - shortly before his death, he was tasked with converting a convent into an asylum: Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Glastonbury.

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ack inside the chapel, Lucy struggled with a splitting headache. She didn't want to ask for the aspirin, showing weakness in front of Morson.
What are you waiting for? Sometimes she thought she was in a dark room, waiting for a photograph to unfold - the photograph of her entire life.

Where was the captain, this Lucius, Morson had mentioned? It might have been a common name in Roman times, but she never came across a Lucius in her life. Was he the only one waiting?
Colonel Gresnick was nowhere to be seen. As for Cardinal Sinclair, he hadn't spoken for hours. He just stood there, staring resolutely at the altar, as if he
waited for it to open and God's army of angels to emerge to rescue him.
Morson patted Lucy on the shoulder, then led her to a small side room. Colonel Gresnick was sitting on a plastic chair in the corner. On one wall was a large framed oil painting of Longinus piercing Jesus' side with the Spear of Destiny.

'So, Lucy, I don't believe you've been properly introduced to Colonel Gresnick,' Morson said. 'He works for the Defense Intelligence Agency in the United States. He came here to get in touch with his ex-boyfriend in MI5.
They wanted to know why he defected from Delta Force. Above all,

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They wanted to know why we were so interested in you and the Holy Grail. But you know the answers, Lucy, don't you? '
"I think you are collecting all four Grail Hallows," said Lucy. "I think you intend to use them in a special ceremony."
Morson smiled. 'Who knows? - Maybe you're banging on the 'He' button.
turned to Gresnick. "I thought the colonel here might be interested in our little chat. You never know, maybe he'll share some of his knowledge with us. From what I can gather, Mr. Gresnick has been studying my organization for some time."

'What organization is this?' asked Lucy, but she didn't get an answer. 'Well, we've got a lot of time to kill until nightfall,' Morson said. 'That's when the action starts. " He looked at the painting of Longinus. "I would like to tell you a story while we are waiting. "After finding plastic chairs for Lucy and himself, he snapped his fingers before starting.
"There is a special mountain in the northern foothills of the
Pyrenees in the Languedoc region of France," he said. "It is almost four thousand meters high and commands a spectacular view. Last year we climbed to the fortress on the summit. The mountain is called Montségur, which means 'Mount of Safety', but, in the spring of 1243, it was not nothing safe. It was the site of the Cathars' last stand against the Catholic crusaders. Ten thousand soldiers surrounded the stronghold, but although there were only a few hundred defenders, the siege lasted for 10 months due to the terrain being so intractable. It was impossible for the Crusaders to completely surround the mountain and cut off supplies to the Cathars. The Cathars had several experienced mountaineers in their ranks who were able to enter and exit the fortress, descending the sheer rock face on one side of the castle, easily eluding the besiegers.
"Three peculiar incidents happened at the end of the siege. When the defenders finally realized their position was hopeless, they negotiated with
the Crusaders and were offered unusually good terms. All the
mercenaries hired by the Cathars were to be released and the Cathars

if all would be forgiven if he recanted his heresy. Any heretic who refused would suffer the normal penalty of being burned at the stake. The defense asked for two weeks to consider the terms. It appeared that they were trying to buy time to allow them to perform one last special ceremony within Montségur, a ceremony that would take place the night before the official handover. Some people have claimed the special date was the spring equinox, March 14, 1244.
"There is no record of what happened that night, which entailed the ceremony. What is known is that many of the mercenaries who would have been allowed to go free the following day, instead converted to Catharism, knowing certain death awaited them .
"The next day, March 15, more than two hundred men and women who refused to abandon their Cathar beliefs were taken down the mountain to a palisade erected in a
field. They were tied to stakes and burned to death
in
but if. This place is known to this day as "The Field of the Cremated."
But the incident that lies at the heart of the mystery concerns the Cathars that four members of the garrison made it immediately after the
end of their sacred ceremony. The four were the most experienced climbers of the Cathars.

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They had a very special job to do, one that has ensured that the Cathars have been shrouded in mystery ever since.

"The Cathars supposedly had a great treasure that they wanted to avoid falling into the hands of the Crusaders at all costs. The treasure, whatever it was, was somehow essential to the vernal equinox ceremony and had to be kept within the fortress until that time." date, despite the risk that it might fall into enemy hands. With the ceremony over, elite Cathar mountaineers were able to take the treasure away hours before the official surrender. The Crusaders found no trace of the treasure, and no one from the garrison disclosed it a word about it, despite being tortured.

'To this day, there are all kinds of bizarre suggestions as to what the mysterious treasure was. Some claim it was a miraculous, life-extending elixir and had special healing properties, a bit like the Philosopher's Stone, except it was literal rather than metaphorical. But, as a Gnostic sect, the Cathars hated the material world, so they were unlikely to be looking for something that prolonged their stay in this hell. Likewise, they would not like to be cured of any life-threatening disease. Their ambition was to obtain Gnosis and die as quickly as possible so that they could go straight to paradise. That's why many of them willingly went into the game, even though they could have easily lived.

'Others claimed that the Cathars had the skeleton of Jesus Christ in their possession, thus proving that he did not die on the cross and was never resurrected.
Reportedly, the Catholic Church was so afraid of this secret being revealed that they went to all the trouble of exterminating the Cathars. This version of events is absurd on every level. How could anyone in those days hope to prove that the skeleton belonged to Jesus? More to the point,

Was it one of the central beliefs of the Cathars that Jesus Christ did not have a physical body, just as they could have his skeleton? You can see how easy it is for the Cathars to be misrepresented.

"Many people have said that the treasure of the Cathars was the Holy Grail itself, but why would anti-materialists place any value in a material object? It is ridiculous. Neither does their treasure consist of gold, precious stones, or any other kind of wealth stuff.'

"So, do you know what the treasure was?" Gresnick asked. 'Of course I do.'
"And then?"
"On April 30th, you will see for yourself."
“What made the mercenaries convert to Catharism? Lucy asked. “I've heard that story before and it always perplexed me. I mean, making them sentenced to death.

"Isn't it obvious? They received incontrovertible proof of the truth of Catharism.
But only a few converted," Lucy objected. "Others didn't. Why not?
'"Again, you'll have to wait for the answer, but I guarantee, you'll get it soon.

'You seemed to imply there was some doubt about when the Cathars held their special ceremony,' Gresnick said.
"The vernal equinox was not the date of the Cathars' ceremony," Morson said. "The Catholic Church invented it because they hoped to wipe out all traces of the truth on the most sacred date for the Cathars.

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"What was the real date? "' April 30th. "
"The day Hitler committed suicide," Gresnick said. "The day of the supposed end of the world."
Morson nodded. 'Why do you think Hitler made the defenders of Berlin fight so fiercely for so
long against the impossible? Just like the Cathars at Montsegur, he was trying to buy time to allow a special
ceremony for
to happen.

'Why are you all white? Gresnick asked. 'Is that one of the qualifications for taking part in this special ceremony that you keep talking about? An Aryan race thing?

"Let's just say you'll never be one of us, Colonel." "I would never want to be."

"Many have said this. Our own grandfathers said the same thing when the Nazis were
interrogating them and told them what I just said." "What changed their minds?"

"On April 30, 1945, the Nazis in Nuremberg were able to re-enact part of the ceremony performed by the Cathars.
"So, you're saying your grandparents didn't have Nazi sympathies before they questioned the officials?

"They hated Nazism. That's why they were chosen. But when the enemy offers you irrefutable proof of their error, what do you do? Continue pretending that you are right when you know for sure that you are not? Or do the unthinkable and join the enemy?

"Are you confirming the Nazis were modern Cathars?

"The Nazis were Gnostics, and so were the Cathars. The roots of Nazism go as far back as you can imagine."

'Return to Cain?

Morson looked scared for a moment, then smiled. "You've seen The Destiny Cainite, haven't you? But there's no way you could accurately interpret her. He challenged everyone, even the great professor Reinhardt Weiss. He spent his life trying to understand him. He never did." any serious academic work again while running increasingly bizarre speculations about the Nazis.

But the truth is the most bizarre thing of all. "

'Professor Weiss was my grandfather,' Gresnick said.
Morson visibly paled. "So, you're Jewish as well as black?
"I'm Baptist, actually. My grandfather was Jewish, but he married a gentile. As you know, Judaism passes down the mother's line.
“Yet you have Jewish blood. If I were you, I'd start saying Kaddish. That's what your kind calls
the prayer for the dead, isn't it?” “My type? You're a real Nazi, aren't you? '

"You don't know anything about the Nazis.

"I know they were deranged, genocidal psychopaths.
"They are so far beyond your understanding, you could never begin to guess their true nature. Your grandfather had many theories, but they were all wrong. He had no proof, and neither do you.

"Are you afraid of the truth, Sergeant? Afraid of what my family found out?
"I could never be afraid of you, Gresnick. Tell me what you think

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You know, then I'll tell you how wrong you are. "
'Well, I know all about the occult roots of Nazism. Senior Nazis thought Cain was the father of the Aryan race. Cain, they believed, was blue-eyed,
blond, with pale skin, while his brother Abel was a classic Semite - brown-eyed, dark-haired with sallow skin.
"The Nazi leadership, for obvious reasons, did not openly disclose that they were Gnostics. Only senior Nazis knew who had inherited the mantle from the Cathars and the Knights Templar. They hated the Jews because the Jews were the self-proclaimed chosen people of Jehovah - Satan, as the Nazis saw him. After they dealt with the Jews, they turned their attention to the two other peoples of the "Book" - the Muslims and the Christians, worshipers of Satan as far as the Nazis were concerned. They weren't fighting a political war, it was a Gnostic holy war.
"Their main mission was to gather all the Grail Relics and the Ark of the Covenant, because they believed that with these they could somehow right the wrong committed by their supposed ancestors - the people of Atlantis - when they accidentally destroyed their own island. That's why they The Nazis carried out excavations at sites of religious importance throughout the world and that is why they were always interested in rare religious artifacts.
"What Went Wrong for the Nazis?". Lucy asked.
"My grandfather believed that the Nazis failed because they were unable to identify the real Hallows Grail and the real Ark of the Covenant. Many high-quality forgeries
existed and it was impossible for the Nazis to verify which were genuine. Their plan depended on having the authentic objects Only those who possessed true occult
power.
'What were they planning to do with them?' asked Lucy. 'Morson has all the answers, doesn't he Sergeant?'
Morson smiled. 'OK, Colonel, you're on the right track. And within 36 hours, you'll know exactly what our plans are. "
'I also know that the Nazis believed Cain was Cain's real father,' Gresnick said. His tone, Lucy thought, was deliberately provocative.
MORSON'S eyes blinked. And who could it be? 'Gresnick's response could not have been more shocking. 'Lucifer'.

48

Ernon was at the bow of the ship trying to see through the fog. Everything still became silent. Only the engines made no sound.
His whole life, he felt, was disappearing into a mist like this, somehow coming from Lucy. From what Harrington said, it was as if his entire life was preordained, right up until the breakdown. But that meant he was part of the script too: a puppet on the Lucy Show. Every rope was being cut and he was just a snip away from falling and never getting up again.

Nothing that had happened recently had really sunk in. How could it? It was as if the world, reality itself, were turning inside out. The reflections were coming out of the mirrors.

It was over an hour before the fog lifted, revealing a world bathed in red, the water catching the color of the sky. A new Red Sea. The light gave Vernon a headache. His eyes couldn't adjust to this new red world.

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He assumed they were a long way to the Bristol Channel now, probably deep into the Severn estuary. Kruger said it would be heading beyond Bristol Docks, up the River Avon and into the center of Bristol. He wondered what would like to find the river. A calm city? Bedlam? If Bristol were anything like London, it was probably a ghost town by now.

It disturbed how quickly London had changed from a prosperous and world-famous city to a deserted shell. What happened to the famous spirit of the Blitz? People had gotten on with their lives back then. Nowadays they

They huddled in their townhouses with their families, watching TV and waiting for someone to come and make everything better.
Kruger joined him as they sailed past the docks.
"Completely deserted," Kruger said. "It's scary, don't you think?"
The red sky was almost scarlet now. Vernon had never seen anything so sinister. Does God cry tears of blood? Nature, God - how ever you meant it - was repelled by humanity. Time to end it all?
“Are you ready to service your machine?” asked Kruger, holding his hands in front of him as if praying. “As a child, when I heard people talking about Judgment Day, I always tried to imagine what would happen. Will everyone get in line? Could it be that all we hear sins one another, hear sentence have been passed sentence and passed? Could it be that millions of people are in a vast, crowd grinding before God with a great stairway to heaven on the right and a bottomless trapdoor to hell on the left?

"Or maybe nothing happens," said Vernon.
Kruger shook his head. "Even now, you doubt. Can't you see what's happening? It's all around us. All the signs."
Vernon looked out over the water and saw the ship cutting through the waves. Everyone has to have some role or another in life. Tomé was yours. Why not? Better than Judas. Better than the other Apostles. They were so anonymous, he had forgotten most of their names.
What puppet should you play in the puppet show at the end of the world? No strings attached.
Everything about the river was dead silent. He closed his eyes and tried to think of a prayer, but he had forgotten everything. Just a sentence here and a line there.
Patchwork prayers, patched. Our Father who art in heaven, The Lord is with you. Do not lead us into temptation and blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus. Meaningless, random words. He couldn't remember if he'd ever understood what they meant. Did he ever believe? Do you really believe? He had little doubt that the world was truly ending, but he still couldn't figure out what to believe that God was the true God? Does God really exist?

When he opened his eyes, he wanted to vomit. Hundreds of dead ducks, swans and geese were floating down the river towards them. Water Rats nibbled on its half-chewed innards and eyes. The corpses gave off a nauseating smell. The miasma of corpses, the vapors of the dead. The air itself seemed to be rotting.
They passed a beautiful marina where many millionaires must have lived the high life not long ago, but now all the windows of the luxury apartments were broken, and it looked like everything had been ransacked. Luxury yachts, sunk, now lay like shipwrecks in the marina. Ghost ships. A ghost world. Just the echoes of people

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remained. Where was everything that went? Vernon remembered hearing that in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb was detonated, all that was left of a person was their shadow on the wall. Perhaps this was the fate that awaits us all.

Without warning, thousands of crows burst into the sky, their flapping wings generating a deafening whooshing noise. They gathered on the roof of a nearby office building. Vernon involuntarily lowered himself. He hated crows. They circled the ship for a few moments, then flew towards the center of Bristol.

The ship passed under several bridges. There were no cars on the bridges, no signs of police or soldiers. There are no barriers. It seemed like the army didn't bother setting up patrols here. In London, much of the city was cordoned off. Tanks crawled through the streets, along with long lines of military trucks and armored vehicles. Nothing here. Perhaps the military had stayed out of town, deciding nothing could be reused. How bad were things in the country as a whole? The hysteria in London had been growing, becoming almost palpable. People were losing their reason as they began to realize this really might be the end.

How does she come? A huge explosion? The blinding light? The tidal wave, perhaps? Maybe a superhurricane. Smoke and ash from earthquakes blotting out the sun? A sudden freeze? A nuclear winter? A fire can enrage the entire Earth, boiling the seas. Everything was possible. Room 101 for every member of the human race.

Vernon looked at Kruger, but he didn't return his gaze.
The crows Vernon had seen before were lined up along the near river bank. He couldn't help but tremble. Were there birds like these all over the world? - The observers at the end of the world, only their black eyes left to see. So much decay for them to feed on. The world was consuming itself, burning its own flesh, with its volcanoes. Eruption columns stretching ten miles into the sky. Gas, ash and rock. Lightning cracks open the crimson sky. Magma flows. Superheated gases, pyroclastic flows. Boiling, bubbling seas. Molten lava. A world splits into all its open fault lines at the same time. Hurricanes, cyclones, hurricanes - the planet threw to the winds. Tsunamis, whirlwinds and monsoons. A drowned world.

All the omens that the world was ending were undeniably in place.
Vernon was surprised by a hail of gunfire. An army speedboat raced downstream toward them. He sped past, turned around and began moving parallel to the ship. Kruger signals his men not to fire.

“This is a restricted zone,” said a voice over the tannoy. 'We'll shoot you if you don't come back immediately. "

Kruger handed Vernon a megaphone. "Talk to them."
"I'm James Vernon of MI5," Vernon said, trying to sound as authoritative as he could.
"I'm on a special mission. These men are taking me to Bristol.
"We don't have any information about that."
'Check with Thames House. You can go straight to DG. She personally authorized. "

"Who is your direct superior?

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'Commander Charles Harrington.

As the MI5 officer contacted, Vernon looked at the four soldiers on the deck of the patrol boat, one of them behind a large machine gun. They were spaced out - drugged or drunk. It wouldn't be for long, he thought, until they were on the trigger. Apocalypse Now wannabes. A disaster waiting to happen.

"I can't get to Thames House," said the officer, after a few minutes, "but I'll trust you and let you go ahead. I have to warn you that the center of Bristol is extremely dangerous
right now. An curfew is in effect from 10 a.m. to 10 a.m. Most of the population have been evacuated to temporary
camps outside the city. I don't know what you want in the city center, but believe me, it's not there anymore there. Everything was looted.

"I'll take my chances." Vernon waved half-heartedly, as the patrol boat sped off. So martial law was declared after all. It had only been a matter of time.

The ship traveled onwards, the only craft visible on the river now.
On the right bank, ruined warehouses appeared up: old and Gothic, with dark, almost black masonry,
and all the windows broken. They looked centuries old, probably
from the time when Bristol was a flourishing port with an active slave trade. Dark, louring, filled with unforgiving
lines of small arched windows with bars above them, they resembled a Victorian prison or perhaps a madhouse.
Another image popped into Vernon's mind - the warehouse from that scary old silent film Nosferatu. He couldn't
remember if that film was black and white or sepia. The whole world looked like
sepia now, and even the sepia was fading. Do all the colors in life end up disappearing and leaving everything in black and white? Or a planet of nothing but gray. Was that the best way for the world to meet its end: colorless, bleached, nothing more white bones left in the sun?

Further ahead, an old cruise ship appeared, sunk in the mud. Vernon remembered it well - a disco ship with a revolving dance floor that once attracted thousands of young clubbers. No more.
The music was very over.
The ship continued to plow forward. By now, almost all of Kruger's soldiers were on deck, looking at the ruins of the city. Multicolored dovecotes on a hillside were on fire. Trapped pigeons made a pitiful screeching sound as they tried to escape their cages. Every now and then,
one broke free, its wings on fire.
He rose a few feet before falling back down in a fiery death spin; a small ball of
fire in the darkness.
Thousands of pages ripped from hard-core porn magazines drift past the ship. Many of them had washed in mud banks, covered in green slime.
'A trip along one of hell's rivers, huh?' Vernon muttered. 'Civilization has been broken. Even if we survive this, how can everything be put back together?

"There are no good results," Kruger replied. "Everything is going to change, one way or another.

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another." He placed his hand on Vernon's shoulder. "Let's go to the beach. See what people are like. "

Vernon felt a tremor of apprehension. "Is it worth the risk? I mean, it's just the scum of humanity out there right now.
'I want to know what this brave new world is like,' Kruger replied.
They stopped at an anchoring point, then six of them stepped onto a wooden dock and carefully made their way to the dock. The first building we came to was an old Victorian structure, painted bright white, called the Dead House.

"What a name," Vernon muttered. He stopped to read a sign on the door. He said the dead house belonged to the river police and was where bodies found in Avon were laid,
pending identification.
Kruger opened the door and entered, swinging his pistol in an arc. He left quickly, pale.

Vernon's curiosity got the better of him, and he opened the door and went in. There was a terrible smell. In the corner of the common room, two corpses lay on tables. The rats were crawling over them, silently, feasting on their faces. Vernon backed away quickly, letting the door slam behind him.

As he tried to see where the others had gone, a man and a woman came running towards him. They sang, held each other, then ran into a peculiar building, shaped like Noah's Ark.

The sign on the door said, "Only the elect 144,000 will be saved. Their names are recorded in the Book of Salvation. Are you one of them?"
All the religious pigs are out of the house, Vernon thought, looking at the strange building. He could imagine all the millions of fundamentalist Christians in America standing on hilltops with their arms outstretched, awaiting the Rapture - the magical moment when the chosen one disappeared from this earth as God lifted them to Paradise.

He opened the door. Dozens of men and women were on their knees, murmuring and praying, some speaking in tongues. Some God exhorted with outstretched hands and glassy
eyes.
For a moment, Vernon felt sick. Who were these people praying? Your delusions, your lack of intelligence, your poor education?
None of the congregation looked at Vernon. They were all too caught up in their religious ecstasies. Maybe that was the best way to face the end - out of your skull, an overdose of false beliefs,
excessive ingestion of whatever comforting lies and emotional crutches you could find. Vernon preferred the palliative solution; big injection of morphine. He had never taken hard drugs in his life. There was something appealing about escaping during your first big league drug trip.

Depressed, he wandered back, soon finding himself in the square of a luxury property called the Blue Anchor Court. Just when he thought he had lost the others, he entered the center of the court, almost nonchalantly.

"Listen," Kruger said, raising his hand to stop his soldiers. 'What's that' The sound was unmistakable - an ice cream truck, playing Three Blind Mice. It was so discordant.
Why would an ice cream van be here in the

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in the middle of this ghost town?

"There can't be any vans here now," Vernon said. "The city was shut down.

They went looking for the van and found it parked on a street away, outside a tower. As soon as he saw it, Vernon knew something was wrong. No one was inside, and there were no customers. Just let the music play. Three Blind Mice, over and over again.

Vernon hated it. To stop. Just stop, for Christ's sake.

He even went to turn off the damn music. Looking into the service hatch, he saw that all the ice cream on the trays had melted. The severed hand rested on a tray of melted vanilla, a grotesque raspberry ripple.

Kruger opened the front door and turned off the jingle. "There's a body inside," he said.

Vernon turned around to look and immediately put his hand over his mouth. The ice cream seller had been cut into pieces by machetes.

"Let's get out of here," Kruger said.

At the corner of the street, they found an electronics store. Plasma TVs were on display in the window, lying among the broken glass. Several of the TVs were missing, probably looted. The rest were sitting there in good condition.

'Look,' Kruger said, pointing to the little glowing red lights on the TVs' control panel. 'Your standby lights are. There is still power. "

He entered the store, and a moment later, all the TVs came closer. Half of them showed BBC News 24, probably the only channel still broadcasting. On the others, there was nothing but static. Dead channels. Vernon stared at the blasts of meaningless noise. Was the whole world like what it is now? Blank transmissions. Dead air.

On BBC screens, a stressed-out male presenter looked sadly into the camera.

"I can't hear anything," Vernon shouted to Kruger.

A moment later, the sound came, and the picture changed. 'Jesus,' Vernon gasped. A mural image of Raphael had appeared.

"Today, the Vatican revealed the existence of a masterpiece unknown to Raphael," said the presenter. He looked incredulous as he read from his teleprompter. 'The mural is said to give the date of the possible end of the world. That date is 4/30/2012, 36 hours from now. Vatican officials claimed that the mural identifies someone living today who can prevent the destruction of humanity. They asked everyone to pray for Lucy Galahan. Ms Galahan is reported to be a thirty year old English Catholic whose current whereabouts are unknown. The Vatican has declined to comment on the allegation that Ms. Galahan is in fact mentally ill. A

A former Oxford University professor, Galahan wrote a controversial analysis of the Holy Grail legends a couple of years ago, in which she claimed that they hid a heretical secret."

The image appeared on every screen - the glamorous advertising photograph Lucy had used for the dust jacket of her book. 'The world's last hope? A caption said underneath the image.

49

In the bombed-out library in Berlin in late 1945, my grandfather came across an ancient manuscript by a Gnostic sect known as the Ophites'

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Gresnick said. "They got their name from the Greek word ophis - serpent. They were snake handlers and practically worshiped snakes. The remarkable thing about them was that they had a completely different opinion about the story of what happened in the Garden of Eden."
Lucy thought some of the ideas she had presented in her book were strange, but Gresnick was doing his best to prove that they were distinctly sober.
"I have your attention, I see." Gresnick stared at Morson. "In this version of the story, a stranger arrived in Eden bearing an extraordinary birthmark - a double serpent on his forehead. Over time, the myth became confused and people came to believe that a real serpent appeared in the Garden of Eden. The stranger spent all his time with Eve, telling her incredible things. He said he had secret knowledge of the true nature of the universe. He called this special knowledge Gnosis, and the Tree of Knowledge was his symbolic way of representing Gnosticism Good and evil, he said, were totally different from what Adam and Eve were taught by Jehovah.
"Then the legend arose that Eve was tempted by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In fact, what happened was that she was taught by the strange serpent Gnosticism. There was no literal tree of Knowledge in Eden, not forbidden fruit. After all, why would the Lord create a tree, place it in the middle of the Garden of Eden, and then stop Adam and Eve from eating from it? That made no sense, even to the Lord. If he had done this, he himself would have been guilty of tempting Adam and Eve. What was forbidden was any knowledge that defied the Lord. Gnosticism was the forbidden knowledge, forbidden because it was the first heresy - Original Sin.

'Eve managed to convince Adam to listen to Gnostic ideas, hence the myth that Eve tempted Adam to join her in eating the forbidden apple. What she kept secret was that she was pregnant, and Adam was not the father. The first person born on earth, according to the Old Testament, was Cain the

be the first true human being. His brother Abel soon followed, and this time Adam was the father.
"When they grew up, the difference in appearance between Cain and Abel was obvious. They fought throughout their parentage, and, on Cain's birthday, Abel tried to kill Cain - with an old spear he had found."
"I've heard enough," Morson said. 'Go back to the other room.
"No," Lucy said, 'I want to hear it. " She was surprised when Morson shrugged and gestured for Gresnick to finish his story.
Gresnick allowed himself a smile.
'Cain fought Abel's spear and killed him. He knew he could no longer live with Adam and Eve and fled east. The Old Testament said he was banished to the Land of Nod, but there is no such place. Nod simply means wandering. In other words, he began a nomadic life. He eventually settled in Canaan, Cain's land, the same territory Jehovah later promised Cain mortal enemies: the Jews, Jehovah's chosen people.

"The Old Testament also says that Cain was marked by God. This was also false. Cain, like his real father, had a double serpent birthmark - the so-

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called Mark of Cain. For some reason, it only became distinct once a year: April 30, Cain's birthday, and, after Abel's death, the anniversary of the first murder in human history. "

'SS,' said Lucy.
"Forgive me?"
"Don't you see? If the Nazis are linked to Cain, that's why the SS adopted two sig runes for their insignia. The SS represented two serpents.
"They also had the death's head symbol, just like the Knights Templar," Gresnick said.

Lucy felt her brain spark. It all came out with her, all her old academic enthusiasm.

And the swastika," she said. "That was an ancient Hindu symbol for
reincarnation. The Gnostics called metempsychosis reincarnation - transmigration of souls. Any soul, trapped in a human body, that failed to achieve Gnosis was condemned to reincarnate in a new body, and live again in the material world.
Thus, the Nazis chose the swastika to show their Gnostic allegiance and their belief in reincarnation as the penalty for remaining married to this world. The swastika is just two square Ss stuck together at right angles, another form of the mark of Cain."
Gresnick smiled. 'Cain and his people became famous for technological achievement, and they spread out from Canaan, building great cities where they settled. Its most famous city was a marvel of architecture and engineering, full of people from all over the world, speaking different languages. Babel '

And that became Babylon," Lucy said. "And centuries later Canaan fell to the Hebrews, becoming the land of Israel, the Babylonians invaded, plundered

the Temple of Solomon, in Jerusalem, and took all the treasures it contained, including, perhaps, the Ark of the Covenant.
Gresnick nodded. "Some Babylonians took ships and went looking for new lands to live, and the rumor was that they took the ark with them.
They went to the far north, to the land that legend said was beyond the north wind. It is called Hyperborea in Greek. The Latin name was Ultima Thule, or generally just Thule:. Land at the end of the world'

Lucy tried to gauge Morson's reaction, but his face was expressionless. "The people of Thule made another great journey," Gresnick continued, 'The most famous island of
all... Atlantis. According to legend, Atlantis was destroyed over two and a half thousand years ago on no less than April 30th, following an apocalyptic religious ceremony. The rumor was that the Ark of the Covenant was the centerpiece of the ceremony.

"The few survivors then spoke of finding a new Atlantis, a lush land marked by a special star called Merica.

Lucy almost clapped. 'America!'
"That's right. America was not named after Amerigo Vespucci. She got her name because the people who discovered it thought it was the mythical Gnostic land that lay beneath the shining star Merica.

"So who discovered America?"
'The Knights Templar, Lucy. The Templar fleet that set out in 1307 to escape persecution from the Catholic Church had no choice but to find a new

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land, beyond the reach of the papacy. Once they discovered America, they kept it a
closely guarded secret. They made sure that no word got back to Europe, knowing that if nothing leaked, the
Pope would send an armada against them to conquer them and take advantage of their new country.

"It wasn't until the end of the 15th century that they changed their strategy. They lost many men in wars against
the Native Americans, and the knights were unhappy with having to take Indian women as wives. Their
settlements were failing. They needed an influx of Europeans to make America viable.The Templar they chose
for their most important mission was one of the most famous men in history - Christopher Columbus.

'Columbus knew exactly where the New World was for the simple reason that he already lived there.
That's why no one is sure whether he was Italian, Spanish,
Catalan or Portuguese. In fact, he was American. Isn't that the irony?
The so-called discoverer of the Americas was an

American all along.
"When the ships Santa Maria, Pinta and Niña embarked from Spain in 1492, they changed their sails as soon
as they were out of sight of land, and raised new sails decorated with the red
pattée Cross of the Knights Templar. A Scottish Templar called Sir John Drummond was the man
who drew up the maps and charts they used on the journey.

"The history of America is largely the history of persecuted religious minorities, and the first were the Templars.
America is the country of

Order of the Templars - a Gnostic, Freemasonic country. It is the new Atlantis, the beloved home of the Illuminati,
their bulwark against the power of the Vatican.
Lucy had never heard anything like it. That was incredible. At last Morson intervened. His comment scared Lucy.

And that's where my colleagues and I come from. "He had the strangest smile.
"If you look up at the night sky, you will see that Merica is shining brighter than ever."

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he is the world's last hope. Vernon glanced at the nearest plasma screen. It was impossible, but the words
were there, being broadcast to everyone who still had a working TV. Lucy was
really special. He assumed the Vatican had made the decision to publicize it to offer some hope to the world...
to let people know there was still a chance. Even so, he felt it was a desperate act.

The plasma screens showed a succession of photos from around the
globe. They focused on large screens set up in St. Peter's Square, Times Square, Trafalgar Square, Paris,
Berlin, Vienna, Prague, Tokyo, Beijing, Moscow, Jerusalem, Cairo - everywhere in the world that can still transmit
photos. In some places, crowds were tight around the screens, in others, there were only a handful
of soldiers, in others, no one at all. Every big screen displayed exactly the same image: Lucy.

A flustered young reporter appeared in the center of St. Peter's Square, like hundreds

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of thousands of Romans knelt to pray.
"I never knew anything like this," said the reporter. "I am hearing that every television set on Earth is simultaneously broadcasting this unknown woman's image. If the Vatican is correct, the lives of all of us are in their hands.

The great artist Raphael apparently knew this moment was coming five hundred years ago. I really don't know what to say. Could this be true? I'm sure there isn't one of us who wouldn't give anything to believe that, against all odds, someone might be able to save us. But a mentally ill person?

Vernon and Kruger looked at each other.
'Why does the Vatican do this?' Vernon asked. “It’s crazy to get this out there.” "Everyone needs hope," Kruger responded. "Lucy is the only hope." He turned and called his men.

As they walked back to the ship, they found hordes of rats running in and out of the abandoned houses. On a staircase, an old-fashioned automaton in a harlequin costume lay on its back, cymbals
together, its small legs kicking uselessly in the air.

Vernon looked at the crazy spectacle. The automaton's arms moved slower and slower, its batteries running out. After a few seconds, he stopped

completely, their plates ceasing to collide one last time. Was this what was happening to the world? Everything running.
"Come on, let's get out of here," Kruger said.
Back to the ship, which started as quickly as they could. In the distance, columns of dense black smoke rose into the sky - several districts of Bristol were in flames. Unless it
rained, the city would burn to the ground.
They maneuvered to the central port and docked. The water was choked with bloated corpses, many with stab wounds and gunshot wounds.
"Look at the bodies," Kruger said. "His eyes have been removed."
Vernon looked at the mass of dead flesh. "They must have gone crazy," he said.
They disembarked. In the dock was an impressive yacht, the kind a billionaire might buy. Painted
glossy black, it had an imposing golden cross on its bow. He was sitting at an odd angle and Vernon realized he was hidden beneath the waterline. If it had been in deep water, it would have sunk.

“Shall we take a look?” he asked Kruger.
The sergeant shook his head. He ordered his soldiers and the handful of SAS men to wait while he and Vernon went aboard.
As soon as Vernon stepped onto the ship, he had a bad feeling. The ship had a ghostly
quality, as if it were the sister ship of Dracula's ship that ran aground with a dead crew.

Pistols in hand, they went down. It appeared that there had been a frantic firefight on board.
Several dead men in sailors' uniforms were lying around. They didn't have eyes. The word Repent was written on a wall.
When they reached the flooded basement, Vernon and Kruger stopped. Hundreds of eyes were bobbing up and down in the water. On the back wall, written in what appeared
to be blood, was a quote from the Bible: If thine eye offend thee,
rip it off.

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'Madness,' Vernon muttered. He retraced his steps as quickly as he could, with Kruger close behind. People turned into savages, turning from religious inspiration to killing. If Bristol had gone that way, what were things like in London?

Kruger ran to a fenced compound on the edge of the harbor. He took a key and opened a padlock, then opened the gate. Inside A large storage facility. The sergeant let open the door and Vernon followed inside. 'Help me with this.' Kruger stood next to black tarpaulins covering several vehicles.

They turned out to be olive green United Nations military Humvees: the closest a car can get to a tank.

"Where did you get that?"

"Let's just say the Vatican owed some favors.

Kruger ordered the injured Swiss Guard to be placed in the lead Humvee, with the two injured SAS men. “We will release these men outside at an army base. They can receive proper medical treatment.

“Where are the rest of us going?” asked Vernon.

'This is with you. Do you remember where the battle of Camlann was fought?

Vernon shook his head.

"In this case, we're going to Glastonbury.

Vernon was furious with himself for forgetting. He looked at the floor and saw a discarded wrapper from his favorite chocolate bar - whole Cadbury Nut. He started to laugh. 'It's okay,' he said.

"I know exactly where Lucy is.

51

ergeant Morson and Gresnick had left the room, leaving Lucy alone. She looked around the simple room, then at the painting of Longinus with his famous spear. Was it really possible that the spear contained the power people claimed for it? In painting, it was just an ordinary Roman knight's lance, but, according to some people, it was a Hebrew spear, as old as the human race. How could a spear contain mystical power? One theory claimed that one of the nails used to nail Jesus to the cross was embedded. Was that enough to turn it into a magic spear?

Morson returned and pulled up a chair next to Lucy.

“We're your friends, Lucy. That idiot cardinal back could never help you.

As for Gresnick, he's a soldier. He knows his duty. Believe me, if he has the chance, he will kill you without hesitation. "

'Everyone says they are my friends. I think everyone wants to kill me.

“We could never harm one of our own. Deep down, you know who you really are.

I mean, below the surface. "

'What are you talking?'

"You see things, don't you? Sometimes, you have strange feelings. Maybe, sometimes, you don't think you're here at all. Your sense of self is weak: practically nonexistent, sometimes.

Lucy squirmed. It was true. Sometimes she thought she was in the wrong skin. The world

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was off track, or she was.
'Life nauseates you sometimes, doesn't it, Lucy? That's why you ended up in an asylum. You know this world is wrong. "
"I do not understand what you mean."
"You understand everything right. You just can't come to terms with it. For most of us, we never get into the situation where we start to remember. Only the most special among us can come to terms with the past.""" I'm not getting it from you.

"We questioned the cardinal. We wanted to know exactly why he was so interested in you.

“It was the mural.

'That's right - our mural. Julius II was a Grand Master of the Illuminati. "So, she was right. Lucy almost conjured a smile. 'What about afternoon Papa?'

"Julius IV was a fool: a good Catholic to the end. He refused to believe that any of his predecessors could be a heretic. He had heard all the rumors about Julius II and decided that the only way to scotch them was give And Raphael?
if the same name.
"He was paid well to create the mural according to a very specific brief.
He didn't suspect anything, although he couldn't understand why he was told to leave a panel blank.

Lucy looked up. "The panel that looks like...
"Well, it's obvious it wasn't painted by Raphael. 'So who? I certainly didn't do it.'
"But you did, Lucy, you did."

52

ucy couldn't take her in. Morson insisted that she had painted on the end of the mural of Raphael and said he could prove it. He made her sit at a small table with a paper and pen.

“Have you ever heard of automatic writing?” he asked.
'Psychiatrists use it. It is a technique for releasing the contents of the unconscious mind from a person.
"Exactly, and that's what we're going to do now. I want you to close your eyes and concentrate on the mural. I want you to think of each panel in turn, starting from the top left corner and working your way up." walk around clockwise.
"And then?"
"For each panel, write down everything that comes to mind. 'But it will be scribbles.
"We'll see soon. Let's get started." Lucy closed her eyes and thought about the mural. It was incredibly vivid, almost as if it were programmed into her brain. A really crazy idea occurred to her: it had been in her mind from the moment she was born. How was this possible?
Each of the panels was so clear it was almost alive. Words were swirling around each panel. Not words in 16th century Italian or Latin. Not English or Spanish, but French: Old French. She started moving her hand, doodling.
The words were pouring out of her at a tremendous speed - words she had

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known her all her life, but it meant nothing to her.
In less than a minute, she was done. She tapped her pen and opened her eyes. She had no idea what she had written. In front of her was a

pure list of comments in Old French. When she handed Morson the role, she expected him to be disappointed.
“That’s not my handwriting,” he pointed out. "And I don't know modern French, much less ancient French. I know I wrote it, but... I can't have it.
"Yet you did. Even though I was expecting it, I can hardly believe it. It's word perfect."

“Of course what I wrote is empty talk.
'Lucy, did Sinclair inform you of the Papacy's attempts to understand Raphael's mural?
'He said he consulted several people, including Nostradamus.
Morson smiled. He reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out two folded pieces of paper.
Placing them on the table, he smoothed them out, then stepped back.

Lucy studied the first piece of paper. "But this is what I wrote. I mean, it's identical.

"I have already given you the notes on Raphael's mural that Nostradamus presented to the Vatican. He was only seventeen at the time, but his unique talents were already
evident, bringing him the attention of all the great courts of Europe. is the
translation he made into English "In disbelief, Lucy took the sheet and read the translated list: 1. The seed of destruction. The light of darkness.
The creeping evil. Great illusion. The particle of Satan.

2. Rebellion or revolution? Eternal war or murder. Death is the only way out. Only one.
3. They are released. They are enslaved. They have peace. They have war. Heaven and Hell.

4. Temptation. Resistance. The path to paradise. The hardest road of all. The sacred stone of heaven made. The tree has no bark, no branches, and no fruit. Look at the Stone of Destiny.

5. Son of freedom. Take possession of your most special weapon. The original. The progenitor of all weapons. The first blow.
6. Redeems knowledge. It is a stain of infamy and the sacred mark of the Redeemer. By this sign you will know your friend from your enemy.
7. In all its glory. Name him and he must respond to the subpoena. The immutable law.
Deliverance is possible.
8. The wise man. The holy man. The fool. The trap. The house killing.
9. The one who is greater comes later. The Savior. The profet.
10. Betrayal. Assassination. The conspiracy.
11. The death of a couple. The death of hope. The promise of liberation.
12. Who betrayed him and who is the traitor? The silver calculation.
13. They killed God. They collected his blood. They showed the way.
14. The tomb. The descent into a deeper hell. The defeat of death. The promised eternal life. The threat of return.

15. The assembly of salvation. The montage of condemnation. The treasure of heaven. The rock

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sacred.
16. My face. The face of the Redeemer. Abaddon's face. One moment will decide everything.
In the blue. Decision Point. Salvation. Damnation. Choice.
Destroyer or Messiah.
17. Arthur's conception. Only the chosen one can do what no other can. The place of suffering. The death plunge. The death of one of them, or the death of all.
18. Beware of birds of prey. I hope defeated. Killed by spear or sword? What bid? True or false? Bane of Mordred.
19. Bring me the head on a plate. The wrath of God. The difficult path to paradise. You must go underground to find the truth. Under freezing water.
20. Rebuilt. The second chance. Correct the eternal wrong. Your soul. The false cup.
21. The Question. To Eternity. Your soul.
22. In all respects. The message spreads. Choice.
23. The Destiny Cainita.
24. Look in the mirror. Salvation or damnation. The final judgement.

****

At first, Lucy's comments were cryptic nonsense, almost random, but the more she looked at them, the more they made some kind of crazy sense.
"You're beginning to believe it now, aren't you?" of the mural.

ucy stared at Morson, trying to absorb what he said. If he was right, there was only one conclusion.

"Reincarnation is a reality," Morson said. "We have all been reborn many times, and if we don't achieve Gnosis, we will continue to be reborn. Until April 30, that is."

'You cannot be seriously suggesting that I am Nostradamus'. "It's really so hard to accept?
Difficult? - It was impossible. Lucy didn't know what to say. Morson started to explain to her again, but his words fell on her.
"The reason you know what Nostradamus wrote is that they are your own words: the ones you wrote when you lived as Nostradamus. In your convent, you just repainted the same picture you painted 500 years earlier. The mental problems you are in having were not caused by their parents' deaths. Maybe those were the trigger, but the real cause was that their past

life as Nostradamus was coming to, forcing its way into his consciousness.
It would have sounded like voices in his head; Another personality taking shape inside you

'Reincarnation,' Lucy muttered. "There is no such thing."
'No? Hundreds of millions of Hindus believe in him. The ancient Greeks did it too.

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The Cathars believed him. Every Gnostic sect did. It's the oldest rule of all - any soul that doesn't achieve Gnosis will come back, and keep coming back.
"What you have to understand, Lucy, is that each of us has a soul line as well as bloodline. Our bloodline is the list of physical ancestors genetically related to us. The soul line has nothing to do with genetics.
Each time the
our
the body dies, our soul must find a new host. Most of us forget our previous soul incarnations for the sake of our sanity.
Only the highly sensitive, or those in deep trauma,
have access to their souls' past. That's what's been going on for these last few months. Nostradamus is the most powerful of his previous incarnations of the soul. All of your life experiences have been flooding into your subconscious and ultimately your conscious mind. There was no multiple personality syndrome, no dissociative identity disorder. All of his symptoms related to his soul's memories of his time as Nostradamus. "

"I can't accept this."
'A lot of powerful people didn't have a problem with it. Indeed, they rejoiced in him. General Patton was sure he was Hannibal in a past life. He provided an immediate explanation for why he was such a brilliant general.

Forget West Point, it was his soul-line that made Patton a military genius. "Heinrich Himmler believed that in a past life he was Sejanus, the ruthless right-hand man of Emperor
Tiberius, he was Thomas of Torquemada who led the Jews from Spain, he was Sir Francis
Walsingham, spy for Elizabeth I, he was Joseph Fouché, chief police officer and founder of Napoleon's modern police state.
Always, he was second in command to a powerful ruler. This is the role best suited for your soul line.

"Adolf Hitler was Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian destroyer of Solomon's Temple in 586 BC, he was Herod the Great, who tried to kill Jesus as a child, he was Titus,
the general and future Roman emperor who destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE, he was
Emperor Hadrian, who expelled the Jews from Judea in the year 135 CE, he was King Edward I, who banished the Jews from England in 1290 CE. In all his incarnations, he
was obsessed with the destruction of the Jews .'Why did Hitler hate so much?'

"That's simple. He was the reincarnation of Cain.

54

Ucy was chewing on a piece of bread and cheese that Morson had given him. She was still in the small side-room, but now Sinclair and Gresnick had joined her. Morson provided
them with some stale bread, a piece of Cheddar cheese, and a pitcher of water, then locked everything in. Lucy did her best to focus on the food and block out everything Morson had told her about his past as Nostradamus.

Gresnick had his ear to the door. "Something is happening outside. The soldiers are moving.

'What do you think you're doing?' Sinclair asked.

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It was the first time Lucy had heard the cardinal's voice in a long time. She wondered if this was his biggest nightmare, being surrounded by unashamed heretics who held his beliefs in contempt, and there was absolutely nothing he could do about it. Back in Rome, he was an immensely powerful man, here, nothing.
They treated him like a clown, too weak to pose any threat. "It's dark outside now," Lucy said. 'Didn't Morson say the action would begin at dusk?
"A ceremony of some kind?" Sinclair asked.
They began to discuss the different information they had between them: Gresnick's knowledge of Cainite destiny, and the work of his grandfather and his parents, all the news he had gathered about the theft of sacred relics and the natural disasters occurring in the world. .

As for Sinclair, he knew about Raphael's mural and the Vatican give about recent events. Furthermore, as the head of the most recent guise of the Holy Inquisition, he was an expert on the heretical beliefs of the multitude of Gnostic sects that proliferated in the time of Jesus.
Lucy had her only inside knowledge of Raphael's mural, in addition to the information Morson had given her, and all the knowledge from her time at Oxford. Not forgetting all the material in his controversial book.
Between them, they were convinced that they held the keys to what was happening. They agreed to share as much as they knew seemed relevant. Sinclair started the ball rolling with an introduction to the different Gnostic heresies.
There were at least eighty distinct sects, he said, each emphasizing a slightly different aspect of Gnosticism. The Mandaeans glorified John the Baptist and insulted Jesus, who, they said, falsified John's message; Priscillians against marriage and procreation as things of the devil, the Borborians, in the midst of sexual excess, ate feces and drank menstrual blood, the Ophites revered the serpent in the Garden of Eden for providing humanity with the secret knowledge that the Lord sought to suppress , the Sethians believed that Noah's Flood was Jehovah's attempt to destroy the descendants of Cain, the Cainites extolled Cain as the greatest resistance

fighter against the tyranny of Jehovah, the Valentinians believed that once a man achieved Gnosis, nothing he did from then on was sinful, resulting in license to do anything; Montanists were celibates who condemned marriage and childbirth, the Basilideans believed that Jehovah wickedly helped the Jews to subjugate other nations and thus created the conflict with which the world was already plagued, the Carpocratians believed that sin was the path to salvation . And so it went, every conceivable attack on Jehovah and those who worshiped him.
"I think we can agree The Destiny Cainite and Raphael's mural are what we need to focus on," Gresnick said. "The answer is there, I'm sure of it."
'The Hallows Grail are the solution,' said Lucy. 'They feature on the mural, and they are also mentioned in the Cainite Destiny.
"I agree," Gresnick said. "My grandfather was of course the Cathars and the Knights Templar, once had the entire Hallows Grail in his possession, but lost them during his persecution by the Catholic Church. The Freemasons sought them out, and lately the Nazis have taken the mission My grandfather suspects that if the Grail Hallows were gathered in one place at the same time, they would become a source of incredible power. The Nazis, he

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he believed, he wanted to use this power to destroy the earth.
Sinclair nodded. 'All Gnostic sects agreed that the material world was evil. Logically, the final desire of Gnostics must be the end of the world. If the Nazis were descendants of the ancient Cainite sect then The Cainite Destiny makes perfect sense. "

'OK,' Gresnick said, 'the Nazis sought the Grail Relics. Either they failed to collect all of them, or one or more of them were fake.
Sinclair agreed. "Virtually every religious relic has been forged. The Middle Ages saw a lucrative trade in sacred relics. Several of the chalices in Europe lay claim to being the Holy Grail. There are several possible Spears of Destiny." He looked at the painting by Longinus. 'Fakes won't work," he said, "no matter how much you believe in them. You must have the real thing. I believe Raphael's mural reveals where the genuine relics are hidden, but only one person can truly locate them. "He turned to Lucy.

Gresnick nodded. 'This is all about you, Lucy. That's why Morson said you were the most important person in the world. Without you, they will never be able to collect the true Hallows
Grail. And without them, it's sunk.

55

ergeant Morson entered the room, carrying a Bible. A large, powerful man with cropped blond hair, he had a way of dominating any room he entered. Lucy felt herself physically shrink when he was
near her. "Have a nice chat?" He threw the Bible to Cardinal Sinclair. "Does the truth sicken you? Is that why you cling to this book of lies?"

Sinclair looked at him but said nothing.
"A priest,' Morson said, "is a person who, in the name of nothing but the truth, tells nothing but lies. The bigger the lie, the more fiercely it is proclaimed as the truth. Lies are bathed in incense
and paraded in front of the deluded masses as if they are the most unshakable pillars of reality,
when in fact they cannot even support themselves.

"And you think Gnosticism is the answer?" Sinclair retaliated. ""Religion" which
claims the world is evil.
"Your predecessors sat in the Court of the Holy Inquisition to pronounce on my predecessors. Why not take this opportunity to put the adherents of the Book on trial? Let us examine
the claims of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims? What do you think, Cardinal? Or do you feel

comfortable only when you have torture chambers at your disposal?

"Say what you want. It won't change anything. Heretics have cried in the desert
for millennia and their voices have always faded to nothing. "Your voices have not gone, Cardinal. Far from it. We have the Book of Moses in our possession.
This reveals exactly what the Lord said to Moses when the Hebrew prophet disappeared for forty days and nights on the summit of Mount Sinai. It's the wildest book you could ever imagine.

Jehovah is revealed in his true colors: the Anti-God, God, through a glass

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dark. An inversion, a perversion, a black hole from which light, hope and truth can never emerge. A better name for the Book of Moses would be the Gospel According to Satan.

'I don't believe you,' Gresnick said.

"Of course not. That's why we worship false gods." You're taking everything out of context, twisting everything.

'Am I? Under the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount is a huge, rough-hewn bulge of rock. This is what the Temple Mount is all about, which makes it the holiest site on Earth. This rock is sacred to Jews, Muslims and Christians because they all believe that this was the place where creation began. This rock was the first material object ever created in the universe, touched directly by the hands of God.

"And this is the same place from which Muhammad is said to have ascended to heaven. But it is also the place where Abraham, the first Jew and the patriarch of all three religions, planned to sacrifice his son Isaac. Can you imagine any good God asking his chief prophet to sacrifice his own son? And can you imagine any sane prophet contemplating it? Only Satan would make such a request, and only a Satanic prophet would be prepared to carry it out. Of course, this Satan's apologists say that he had no intention of that Isaac must actually be killed. So why even suggest it?

"Never forget, the Lord preferred Abel's animal sacrifice to Cain's vegetarian offering. From the beginning, he showed his blood intent. First animal sacrifice, then human. Suicidal kidnappers shouting Allah Akhbar as they fly plans of people common in skyscrapers - which is the will of Allah. Christian pilots dropping atomic bombs and destroying tens of thousands of people in the blink of an eye, wiping out women and children, and calling it "collateral damage." This is God's will. Jewish gunships blow up a Palestinian family having a picnic on the beach, Jewish soldiers throwing dead children to throw stones, taking bulldozers over human rights protesters - that's Jehovah's will. This is not God, this is Satan: the god of evil, of human slaughter on an industrial scale. This is the mechanization of the massacre.

"And these people who worship Satan - the Jews, the Christians, the Muslims - have the courage to speak out about the need for tolerance and multi-culturalism. How dare these people look each other in the eye? How can they have to be the next-door neighbor of someone who thinks they're going to hell? Do they wave to each other in the morning and exchange hypocritical pleasantries? Can there be anything more stomach-churning? However, you don't agree with me that Satan created these religions.

"At least Hinduism is right about reincarnation. If we have an eternal soul, why are we only allowed one chance to lead a good life? Why not two, ten, a thousand, as many as we need? Why just a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, with hell awaiting you if you get it wrong?

'And what about the Gnostics?' Cardinal Sinclair said. 'What good can come from claiming the world is evil? It's insanity.

"Insanity? Well, we don't believe in sending anyone to hell. We think hell is already here. Our mission is free to all. We want to bring every lost soul back to the true God. The Jews, the Christians, the Muslims, the Hindus , you

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Buddhists, atheists - everyone - we want to save them all, to restore every lost soul to paradise. Even all the people who hated us, persecuted us, fought us, resisted us - even they will be saved. Same as you, cardinal. You want to send me to hell and I want to deliver you to heaven, but you claim your religion is superior to mine. Muslims want to blow me up while I want to take them to heaven. The Jews want to condemn me forever because I tell them that Jehovah is Satan, but I want them to join me in paradise, to be bathed in the light of the one true God. Gnosticism is the only moral religion, a true religion of love, peace and forgiveness. "

"What about the Holocaust?" Gresnick snapped. "Doesn't that disprove everything you said? That was the most terrible act in history and was ordered by

Gnostic leaders of Nazism." For the first time, Morson looked ashamed.

"I agree," he said after a few moments. "We will always be ashamed of this.
We abhor senseless violence, and the Holocaust had no point at all. There was a particular context, as that's all I can say. It's not an excuse, but it explains why this happened.

"After Hitler conquered France, one of the first places SS soldiers went was the Gothic cathedral of Chartres, where they began digging into the crypt, looking at the Ark of the Covenant.
Chartres was long suspected of being the home of the Ark for a reason very
simple. On the north portico of the

cathedral are sculptures representing the Ark of the Covenant, and on a pillar is an inscription in Latin saying Hic Amicitur Archa Cederis, that is, here is hidden the Ark of the Covenant.
The SS found something buried beneath the crypt and had no doubt that it was the missing Ark." Hitler was

elated. Then more incredible news reached him. He had always believed that two of the Hallows Grail - the dish and the Holy Grail itself - were hidden in England, and that he would have to conquer England before he could claim them. But SS excavation operations in Languedoc discovered a goblet and plate near the village of Rennes-le-Château, and they looked authentic. Hitler was surprised. This meant , he thought, that he had all four Hallows Grail - the chalice, the plate, the Spear of Destiny from the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, and a matching sword from the same place: the so-called Sword of St Maurice - and he also He had what he thought was the authentic Ark of the Covenant. In other words, he had everything he needed for the most sacred ceremony of all."

'What it is?' Gresnick said.
"You'll find out when April 30th dawns.
'So what happened to Hitler and his ceremony?' Lucy asked.
"On April 30, 1941, perhaps the high water mark of Nazism, Hitler and twelve senior members of the SS went to Montségur. French peasants reported that hundreds of German
planes flew over the fortress in strange formations. One of the formations was a swastika , and another to pattée Cruz. Of all the men who participated in the ceremony, only one was still alive by the end of 1945: SS-Sturmbannführer Hans Lehman. We will be performing the same ceremony within 36 hours... with some new elements added .

"All I can say is that Hitler's ceremony failed and he was devastated. Some

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They say his mind failed him and he was never the same man again. He blamed his failure on Jewish machinations and, that same day, he formulated his plan for the Final Solution. It was the act of a desperate man, his judgment damaged beyond repair. In June 1941, he launched the invasion of the Soviet Union, the home of what he regarded as Jewish Bolshevism, and the Nazis' long march to defeat began.

"I do not intend to defend Hitler's actions. After April 30, 1941, he was disturbed as far as I am concerned. Lehman believed so too. But our crimes of the past are behind us. On April 30, 2012 , there will be no mistakes. The age of the Demiurge's false religions, his reign of terror, is almost over."

"The Catholic Church has seen thousands as in the past," said Sinclair, standing up. "We will hold out long after you disappear.

'Serious? Let me tell you that the collective message of the people of the Book is: hatred, slaughter, division and death. This is what the children of Abraham believe and their two central propositions are: if you don't agree with us, we will kill you, and, if you don't agree with us, you are going to hell. And yet they call themselves good and decent people.

"The irony is that the question of hell is already resolved. According to Christians, every Jew killed is in hell. All these Holocaust victims - straight to hell. The same is true of Islam. Great prophet of Islam is in hell. Not as speculation, as fact. Even as we speak, all Muslims who say peace be upon him are referring to a person currently in hell, suffering all its torments. If Muhammad is not in hell at this very moment, then all Christians are wrong and hell is full of popes and saints. Don't you think this is amazing? The game is very long, but no one knows the outcome, although their eternal souls depend on it. In this game of life, with heaven as the reward for winning and hell the punishment for losing, the correct way to play the game is already known in every detail, but the game's creator refuses to reveal the results of the billions of games that have already finished. Only when our lives are over and it is too late for us to change our game plan will we learn the scores.

"If Muhammad is even now in hell, why doesn't God let the Muslims know so that they can change their evil ways? If the popes and saints are in hell, why hasn't God put Christians out of their misery? If heaven It's full of Jews, why don't the Lord tell Christians and Muslims that they have it fatally wrong? No game could be more deadly than this. What kind of sick mind comes up with something like that?

Just a satanic mind.

"What sane person can deny that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the work of Satan? They float on a sea of blood, of crosses of the dead that extends in all directions. There is no love, only hate, no peace , just war; no compassion, just unlimited cruelty. Humanity's greatest benefactor would be the person who put an end forever to these crazy Devil-inspired religions.

'And you think she's sitting there?' Gresnick said slowly.

Morson nodded. "In a few hours, Lucy will rescue us from hell."

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he door was unlocked and opened slowly. Passos retreated. What was happening? Morson had left an hour earlier. Neither of them liked to admit it, but his outburst had disturbed them. Sinclair declared that Heretics often sounded persuasive on first hearing, but reflection soon revealed how absurd their arguments were. It didn't sound like he believed that himself.

Gresnick got up and approached the door. "There's no one here. They're all gone. Amazed, Lucy and Sinclair joined him at the door. The chapel was deserted.

Lucy ran to the front entrance. When she opened the door, she involuntarily stepped back. A black car with four black, blind horses were in the garage - a hearse. Two men in black top hats and frock coats sat in the front seats.

The hearse had glass windows. Lucy, looking inside, was confronted by a black coffin, covered in black wreaths.

Other men with hats and tails appeared around the sides of the chapel and marched in procession to the rear of the car. They called the coffin and hoisted it onto their shoulders.

Lucy thought men wore white makeup. They looked ghostly, like creatures that had entered through a portal from another world. Many other men now appeared, all in the same strange costume, with the same white chalk faces.

Gresnick and Sinclair were right behind Lucy now. 'What is happening?' Gresnick asked.

'Devilry,' said Sinclair, stepping out into the snow. One of the mourners pointed a pistol at him and motioned for him to go back in. The man came and handcuffed Sinclair and Gresnick.
Stillness resolved. There were no sounds. The night had died somehow. There was something strange about the coffin. Lucy could tell it was connected to her in some way, but she didn't know how.
Eight men carried the coffin into the chapel, with the others following. The pallbearers marched down the center aisle and placed the coffin on a black catafalque. All the men saluted. One of them, wearing white gloves, removed the coffin lid.

Lucy realized she was supposed to go to the front and look inside the coffin. Everyone moved out of her way as she walked down the hall. As she approached the coffin, her legs took her slower and slower, as if she were wading through molasses. However, there was nothing in the coffin that could scare her. Their own ghosts were far away.

Reaching the foot of the coffin, she glimpsed a figure inside, covered in a white shroud, her face hidden by a veil of white muslin.
'Who is it?' She whispered to the man in white gloves, but didn't make him respond.

She climbed along the side of the coffin, trying to see through the veil. Why did the soldiers go to all this trouble? Was it one of your colleagues who had been killed in action at Tintagel? However, she couldn't free herself from

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the feeling that it was designed for your benefit. But why? The last thing she wanted to do was look at a dead body.
She remembered the day she and her father went to the
funeral hall to look at her mother lying in her coffin. She and her father held hands as they went inside, praying for strength to get them through the ordeal. His father took one look at his wife's face, then turned away, covering his face as he began to sob. She had never seen him cry. He sat down on a chair and didn't look up again.

Lucy looked at her mother's face, and placed her fingers lightly on her mother's face. The skin was waxy and icy. No longer human, the soul is very far away. The soul? That was the critical question, of course. If

people don't have souls, so that was it. She would never see her mother's face again, except in photos. "The enchantment of summer does not last long," her mother wrote in her last diary entry. Those were the words Lucy placed on her wreath of red roses. Leaning down, he kissed her on the lips and whispered, "Goodbye, Mom."
When her father lay in the same funeral home several months later, she refused to look. She couldn't go through a second time. Looking at the dead
is part of your death too. Corpses are mirrors. They placed intimations of his own death in his mind.
Sergeant Morson, dressed like everyone else, came and stood beside Lucy.
'Why?' Lucy whispered.
“You need to know who you are, Lucy. I want you to see that you are one of us, that you have always been one of us. Remove the veil and see for yourself.” He took a step back.

As Lucy's hand hovered over the man's face, she was sure she shouldn't look. He just wasn't right. She was in the same position as the tourist who found her father
dead in the sea at Tintagel. But his hand reached into the coffin, and
his fingers touched the soft muslin veil. She stared, trying to see through the material to the face below. A man, she decided. Not young, so not one of the
soldiers. What the hell does Morson expect from her?

Slowly, she removed the veil. His eyes got bigger and bigger as more and more of the guy was revealed. Before she had gone halfway, she stopped, her
hands falling to her sides, as if she had been electrocuted.
Oh, Jesus Christ, that can't be.
She reached over her mouth, trying not to vomit. She couldn't breathe. All of his limbs were going numb. Staggering over the benches, she managed to crash into a seat before her legs gave out beneath her. She wanted to scream, but her mouth was barely open.

Sick.
These people were monsters.

he convoy of Humvees did not reach Cadbury Castle until dark. The vehicles passed over the snow-covered fields to get as close to the hill as possible.

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possible, the noise of their engines muffled by the strong wind.
The battle of Camlann, Vernon now remembered very clearly, would have taken place in the grassy fields between the great mound of Cadbury Castle and the banks of the River Cam, the fields yielding in a muddy bog as first snow and then rain be set on the battlefield that day. Lucy, when she brought him here three years ago, tried to evoke

the scene for him. King Arthur was inside Camelot with his small army. Crossing the river was Arthur's nephew Mordred with his much larger army of rebels.
Logically, Arthur should have remained inside the fortress and tried to resist Mordred's siege. Instead, he and his few remaining loyal knights rode in their best, brightest armor. The last cavalry charge.

Vernon climbed out of the Humvee, his boots crunching through the thick snow. In London, snow rarely fell and did not lie much. Here, the snow was several inches deep. In the Humvee's headlights, he looked at it as it shone and sparkled like a field of crystal, but Kruger quickly ordered all lights to be extinguished.

All around Vernon, the other soldiers scattered, including a handful of the remaining SAS men. There was no Smalltalk, just professionals doing their jobs.

"Can you feel it? Kruger whispered. "There's something out there. Vernon nodded. He had felt it for a long time.

'Look up there. "Kruger pointed to the northern sky.
Vernon looked up and saw a small, intense, bright light, like a star.
"Satan's sign. Kruger made the sign of the cross. 'He's here. You know that, don't you?
This is your parody of the Star of Bethlehem'.
Sherlock Holmes got it wrong, Vernon thought. Not even the impossible can always be ruled out. He was sure Lucifer was really out there. There was no point in denying it, no reason to struggle with the impossibility of it. It couldn't be true, but it was. “What are we going to do?” he asked. He remembered what Kruger had said earlier about the possibility of killing Lucifer. Silver bullets just don't cut it. Crucifixes, holy water, garlic - all useless.

They certainly do not have the Ark of the Covenant at their disposal.
"We have to have some chance of rescuing Lucy," said Kruger.
"But how are we going to fight the supernatural? We don't have the right weapons.
"We have our faith. Now, let's go." Kruger led the way up the steep slope of the Cadbury Castle plateau.

It was a difficult climb. The soldiers slipped as they made their way up the snow-covered hill, through the frozen trees spilling tinkling ice crystals. The blood-colored moon hung above the hill, casting the same sickly red light as the sun during the day.

After clearing the trees, they reached the edge of the hill. In the far corner of the plateau, lights were visible.
Kruger raised his night vision binoculars to take a look. "It's a Templar church," he said. "There's a hearse outside.
"A hearse? Don't you think... ""Trust me, Lucy's not dead.

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Vernon felt the cold seep through his uniform and into his bones. Will this nightmare never end? He was exhausted, physically, mentally, in every direction. Yet somehow he knew that his real trials hadn't started yet.

'There are no sentries outside," said Kruger. "We will surround the church. They won't be waiting for us in this snowstorm. It's perfect coverage. The falling snow will cover our tracks. We go ahead of the field and then go around the chapel. If there is a back entrance, we will split into two and break into the front and back doors at the same time. Otherwise, let's move on.

We use flash and stun grenades to disorient them. We will have maximum surprise.

All the troops nodded.
It sounded so good in theory, Vernon thought. However, this creature was out there. How could they beat the Prince of Darkness?

ucy held his head in his hands. "No," she murmured, "it's not real." Morson sat next to her and shook her hand.

'I buried him, said Lucy. "That can't be him."
'You buried a box of rocks, Lucy. We took your father's body and embalmed him. It was our right.

'What do you mean? "The words came out of Lucy's mouth so silently she wasn't sure Morson heard. Her fingers fumbled for her locket, the one she found back in Merlin's cave. Now hanging around her neck, her most precious object. She stood up. and kissed her.

"Let me see that." Morson gestured for her to hand it over. 'I will never let him go. "

"That's not yours. You took it from your father, didn't you?"
Lucy hugged her to her chest.
"We all have one of those," Morson said. "It has the letters DA engraved on the outside."

Lucy was scared. She was always curious about these two letters.
His father said he stood by Latin words that were particularly dear to him, but he never revealed what they were.
"Deus absconditus," Morson said. "It's Latin for Invisible God.
"The Gnostic God?
"The true God, the only God," Morson said. 'Hidden from all those slave to the Creator of this infernal world.
"He pointed to the locket. 'Flip it open.

"I found it near where he drowned. There's a picture of me inside.
"Under his image, you will find one of our most sacred symbols - Chief of Death.

Lucy did what Morson suggested, but she was just going through the motions. She already knew he was right. Slipping out of the small photo, she looked down at his head.

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intricate morte engraved.
"I told you, Lucy - you were always one of us. Your father was our Grand Master, our High Priest, the man with the most illustrious lineage in the world. He can trace your lineage all the way back to the beginning...to our lord on earth and master.

"Are you saying my father was a direct descendant of Cain?" That's why you're the Chosen One, Lucy.

"But why did he kill himself? Why did he leave me? He never told me anything about it. Not even a word. I can't believe you took his body.
"He wasn't in his right mind in the end, Lucy. When he went to Tintagel, he was trying to locate the sword of destiny - the one you found. He wanted to give it to you, to explain things, but he couldn't figure it out. any trace of it.
"Are you saying he didn't kill himself at Tintagel? Did he slip, or something?"
Morson shook his head. 'No, he definitely took his own life. He had to. After all, he committed a terrible crime.
'What?'
"A crime against Gnosticism, against the beliefs he had held all his life: the crime of love. He loved his wife and, above all, he loved you.
Lucy shook her head. "How can you say love is a crime?
'Love was Satan's worst gift to humanity. When Pandora opened the box, the first and greatest of evils to fly out was love.
"I don't understand."
"Love is the glue that keeps souls bound to this world, trapped in this hell. It mires us in misery. Love shines and seduces. No one would endure a moment of this hell if they felt nothing but pain. It is love that allows people to carry it. Love traps us, keeps us in the traps of the material world, this false world of the false god. However, you, better than anyone, know that the underside of love is pain, the worst pain of all.'

Lucy looked away. Morson, in his crazy way, was right. Love is poison. A beautiful poison, but poisoning is all the same. The first taste may be heaven, but what followed was hell.

'What are you going to do with the body? "
"Our tradition is to give our Grand Master a Viking funeral.
Lucy had no objections. When the funeral director asked her every month how she wanted to bury her father, she almost chose the cremation option. As a Roman scholar, he would have approved of leaving this world, much like Julius Caesar, on a funeral pyre.

"A ring," she said. "My father always wore a ring. Do you understand?"
"The ring was passed to your father's successor as Grand Master. I spoke to him on the phone, but I never met him. His identity is a closely guarded secret.

A sound of fighting behind them made Lucy twist round. Colonel Gresnick was standing in the center of the hallway. His handcuffs were gone, and he was holding a pistol. Lucy sighed. The pistol was pointed at his head.

"Come here," he shouted.
Lucy looked at Morson. His face was curiously blank.

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'Don't look at him,' Gresnick shouted. 'He can't help you. Just do as I say and come by. "

Lucy stood. She started to like Gresnick. They had so much in common, so many reasons to be on the same side. Now, she realized, she didn't know him at all. He was going
to kill her, wasn't he? Morson was right all along - only he and his men were interested in protecting her. Her heart pounded as she made her way to the colonel.

"I'm going to get out of here with Lucy,' Gresnick shouted, 'so I want you all to step aside."
"You're not going anywhere." Morson stood up. He and his men drew their pistols.

Gresnick picked up Lucy, twisted the round, with his arm around her neck, and poked the barrel of his pistol against her temple. "I swear, I'm going to kill her."
All the soldiers raised their pistols and aimed them at Gresnick. 'Don't make me do this,' Gresnick said. 'You know I won't hesitate.
"I'm going to count to three," Morson said. "If you don't hand over Lucy, we will shoot you.
One two ...
Gresnick dropped the pistol and released Lucy. She hurried
back to Morson's side.
"I don't understand," Gresnick said. 'You were willing to let me film Lucy. Your whole plan depends on her.
Morson smiled. "No wonder the DIA is so unsuccessful. Intelligence is useless if it is
separated from psychology." 'What?'
"You had a pistol, Colonel, and you had Lucy. If you had intended to kill her, you would have done so instantly. You value your own life too much, or perhaps you value Lucy as much as we do."

Gresnick looked at the floor.
'Place the colonel and the cardinal on one of the middle benches,' Morson ordered. 'This time, use ankle restraints as well as handcuffs. I don't want ...
He stopped, and all his men spun around. Machine gun fire erupted outside.

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Ernon protected himself behind the small stone wall he had found during the confusion.
His heart was beating so much, he thought he might faint.

Jesus Christ, what had happened? It was as if things were waiting, as if they knew it all along.

They advanced along the plateau towards the chapel. Snow was falling. The night was strangely beautiful. Vernon always found snow magical. She transformed old, tired views. It
was like a wonderful rejuvenating powder being sprinkled over the earth.

Then the snow-covered field simply rose up. Vernon gasped as thousands of crows shook off the snow they had left
underneath. As the birds flew upward in a huge, flapping mass, snow fell from their wings like white rain. It was terrifying and stunning at the same time. The ice the crows had dislodged tinkled like strange musical bells as he fell back to Earth. As the crows sped to

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above, which merged with the storm. The wind blew across the plateau, full of snow and ice, stinging Vernon's eyes so much that he couldn't see properly. All of his colleagues seemed to be swallowed up by the night. He was alone, lost.
Every crow cawed, creating a horrible cacophony as wheels and fluttered in the night sky. Then they began to swoop down like Stuka dive bombers, with the same terrifying scream.
Vernon heard the staccato of machine gun fire. He threw himself onto the snow, and reached for the Uzi machine gun Kruger had given him earlier.
Through the churning snow, he saw vague shapes moving. An SAS soldier ran after him, spraying bullets into the air as a swarming cloud of crows attacked. Dozens of crows fell from the sky, blood splashing onto the snow, but the soldiers were letting out horrible screams as well. No one could survive these air raids. There were just a lot of crows.

That was when Vernon crawled away to a wall under the cover of some trees.
He sat there, breathing hard, with his back pressed against the wall.
The ravens were protecting the chapel, he realized. God Almighty, it was like they had human intelligence, or something was controlling them.
Through the blizzard, an immense dark figure appeared. At first he was elevated above the ravens, but soon came descending, passing in front of the red moon. For a moment, the moon shone, as if the light was being sucked into a black hole. The shape appeared to have enormous flapping wings, distorting the air, generating overwhelming explosions of wind turbulence.

"Christ save us," a soldier shouted.
Vernon recognized Kruger's voice and tried to see where he was. The dark shape swept low over the field, flapping its wings.
Vernon could see a little more clearly now. Most of the soldiers had thrown themselves onto the snow and were firing upwards from their prone positions.
Kruger threw a grenade skyward, straight at the shape. There
There was a pause, almost silence, and then an explosion.
The sound of machine gun fire began again, but he seemed desperate.

Kruger came running out of the chaos and threw himself at the wall, where Vernon was hiding.
"He's killing us," he shouted. 'We have to get out of here'.
"We can't let it go," said Vernon. 'Lucy is still in the chapel. "" I should have killed her when I had the chance.
'What?'
"Open your eyes, you idiot. Lucy Galahan is the son of the devil. If you let her live, the whole world will perish.
Vernon pushed him away and ran behind the shelter of the wall.
Immediately, the large, dark shape appeared above him. He tried to scream, but the noise caught in his throat. The creature was flapping its wings, closer to Vernon.
He raised his hands to his ears, trying to silence the deafening sound.
"God help me," he cried... but everything was going black.

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Ucy was surprised by how unfazed Sergeant Morson was by the gunfire.
"No one will harm you, Lucy." He walked towards the door where his
men were busy changing back into their camouflage uniforms. 'I want a patrol ready
in five,' he
shouted. 'Just Reconnaissance.
"Shouldn't we be on full alert, sir?" One of the men asked how the shooting had ended. Then the only sound was that of the crows' high-pitched cawing.

"Trust me, it's just dead bodies out there now."
As Lucy saw a handful of soldiers from the troop outside, she was certain that it was
Kruger and his Swiss Guards who tried to assault the chapel. Coming to kill her, or
rescue her? Everything was so confusing. Does it make sense to talk about good and bad people?
Morson, Kruger, Sinclair and Gresnick all had their own agendas. His father was involved in
this too. She never expected this.
It was terrible to think of the Swiss Guard lying frozen out there in the snow, being mutilated
by the crows. To die so far from home. Maybe one or two
escaped. She hoped Kruger was still alive. It was too cruel for the two brothers to be killed.
Someone would have to inform his mother. It would break
your heart. His two sons, proud strong throwing their lives away. In search of what?

She sat in her usual position in the front seat, and found herself studying the
elegant stained glass windows. It took a moment to notice something strange: in the panel
showing the crucifixion, every figure other than Jesus was smiling. His death was cause
for celebration, it seemed. No wonder no priest came here.

After a quarter of an hour, the door opened and the patrol returned carrying an injured man.
They placed it on one of the benches in the back and Lucy went to the front to see if she could help.
'Oh my God -. James' She reached out, shaking, toward him. Unconscious, not dead. He
survived the helicopter crash, and now this.
'That man has a lot to kill,' Morson muttered.
Lucy looked at Gresnick. He had turned round and was looking at James. Was it true what
he said, that James had planned to kill her? Aside from her parents, she
never trusted anyone as much as she did James.
"Let me take care of him," she begged.
Morson frowned. "Like father, like daughter. For the sake of us all, I should kill him now
same.
'Please don't harm him. "
Morson looked at the altar. 'I'll decide on it later. Now, Lucy, it's time. One of the Hallows Grail is
in this chapel. Find it for us.'

veryone stopped to look at her. Sinclair and Gresnick stared. Lucy didn't want to leave
James, but she knew not to antagonize Morson.
Slowly, she forced herself to walk around the chapel, looking one by one at the Stations of
the Cross. Yehoshua ben Yosef she muttered to herself. As I said

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Morson, it doesn't seem right. Names were so important. Do they define your destiny?
Lucy Galahan. Was she standing here, in this chapel, simply because she had that name? If she were
Jenny Brown, would she be at home with her husband and children, praying to the Prime
Minister to save the country?
She pushed aside the stained glass windows and walked
along each bench, trying to feel something, but nothing happened to her. Why should she be helping Morson at
all? When he told her that her father was their leader, she automatically felt right to help him and
his men. However, she still had no idea what his ultimate plan was. They gathered the Grail Relics and
performed some ceremony, but what then? Was Gresnick correcting this? Maybe the Grail Relics were
a superweapon?

Morson was a man without love in his eyes, just like Kruger. Was it right to ally with people incapable of
love? She agreed with him that love could be the worst of all - she thought often enough -
but a world without love, was that a place where human beings could live? Wouldn't that be the worst hell
ever?

She looked at James lying stretched out in the backseat. A soldier went to administer
smelling salts to him. He wasn't seriously injured, it seemed.
He broke her heart when she had to end their relationship, but she had no other choice. Love paralyzed her.
She couldn't think or relax knowing that

it was right in the end. Being neurotic about a final love affair is, she realized, the same as ending it.

As much as she wanted to take care of James, she also felt uncomfortable being around him. It was hard to
believe that she had her ex-lover behind her and her dead father in front. Love and
death. They were closely linked.
She passed down the aisle on the right, and round the back of the altar, approaching it in the opposite
direction from where her father's coffin lay.
It unnerved him to have to look at that black box. Earlier, she insisted on having the lid put back on.

When she stopped in front of the altar, her fingers tingled. Okay, she knew that if there was any hidden object
in the chapel, the altar was the key. It was just original features of the chapel.

Reaching under the altar, she let her hands run across the cold marble. Near the edge of the altar, a burning
sensation spread through her fingers, the same feeling she got when she touched the sword
in Merlin's cave.
She took a few steps back and bowed her head, almost ashamed of what she was doing. "It's inside the altar,"
she said in a low voice. 'In a hollow compartment.

Morson signaled to one of his men, and the soldier returned seconds later with a sledgehammer. He
went to the place indicated by Lucy and started breaking
the distant altar. Soon, he broke it open, revealing the hollow section Lucy had predicted.
He quickly hammered the surrounding marble then took advantage of the hidden move.

Lucy was expecting Morson to be very happy. Instead, his face turned pale. The soldier handed him the spear
and walked away.
"Isn't that what you wanted?" Lucy asked, intrigued by Morson's reaction. "I

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I feared this moment, because I don't understand what it means."
"I don't follow.
"The one thing we were always sure of was that we already had the true Spear of Destiny in our possession. Hitler himself held the Hofburg Palace in Vienna in his hands in 1938. There was no doubt that it was the right one. It glowed in his hands, just as legend said it would. At the end of the war, General Patton arranged for it to be sent to America, while a fake one was returned to the Hofburg.

'Was General Patton one of you? "

"Have you heard of Article 5?" Morson asked.
Lucy nodded. Gresnick had taken pains to emphasize the importance of Section 5 in their previous conversation. She found it incredibly intriguing.
'Patton became a believer when Section 5 had a chance to talk to him and present him with the facts," Morson said. "Everything he said made sense to him. It was all in line with his existing beliefs about being a reincarnation of Hannibal and so on.

"But Hitler's spear must have been a fake too, said Lucy. "This is the real one.
I'm sure.

"I cannot believe this. What I do know, however, was that there were always two spears that claim to be the authentic one used by Longinus. We have the spear that was part of the Imperial Regalia of the Holy Roman Empire. As for the other, perhaps it is that. "
'You mean the Spear of Antioch, don't you?' Lucy was familiar with the story of the rival spear. During the First Crusade, the city of Antioch was besieged by a large Muslim army and likely to fall at any moment. A Christian monk claimed that he received a vision from St Andrew saying that Lance the Saint was buried in St Peter's Cathedral in Antioch. A lance was duly found and the next day the Christian army marched with spear raised before them and won a famous victory.

Morson nodded. "Even over time, many people were convinced the Spear of Antioch was not genuine. I never took it seriously, but you are the Chosen One and you found this spear for us. From what I know, this is indeed Spear of Antioch, brought from back to England from the Crusades and eventually hidden here.

"There are only four Grail Hallows," Lucy stated. "All of them unique and distinct objects. There cannot be two spears.
'Fakes have always been our main problem,' Morson said wearily. 'Fake Grails, fake spears, fake swords, fake plates. We are not the only ones plagued by fakes. Look at the Catholic Church. Fake pieces of the true cross, fake bones of the Saints. The Shroud of Turin - a fake. In fact, it shows the body of Jacques de Molay, the last Grand Master of the Templar Order. Because Molay rejected Jesus, the Inquisition subjected him to a crucifixion and a false burial in a shroud.

Afterwards, he was burned at the stake on a small island in the River Seine in the center of Paris.
So the Shroud of Turin was fake like everything else. Fake miracles. False visions.
Fake cures. But you can never underestimate the power of false beliefs, can you?
Many more people died because of fantasies than the truth. For us, just enough truth. We must have the authentic Hallows Grail.

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"I don't understand one thing, said Lucy. 'If you thought General Patton took the genuine Spear of Destiny to America and gave a fake one back to the Austrians, why invade the Hofburg Palace? The colonel said Gresnick you invaded me seven different locations. If you are using me to find the Grail Hallows, why do you carry out the attacks?
"We had nothing to do with them," Morson replied.

ucy was surprised. Gresnick had made a big play out of those attacks. Now, it turns out, they were a spectacular red herring. How was this possible?
Doesn't Gresnick say that the evidence showed that only a Special Forces team could have carried out the attacks?

'We were furious when we found out about these incidents,' Morson said. 'It brought attention to something we wanted kept quiet.'
"So who was responsible?" "I have no idea."
Lucy was perplexed. "That spear you're holding is genuine," she said again.
'I swear. "
“That's what worries me. What better way to destroy us than to send a false Messiah?”

Lucy was scared. How could Morson think she was a fake when she never once claimed to be anything special?
"We become trapped by the past," Morson said. "At all times, we have been trying to find safer and safer ways to protect our secrets, better ways to confuse our enemies, deceiving them as our true intention.
But over time, we lost
many of our records. On several occasions, the most important members
of our brotherhood have been killed before they could pass on their secrets.
Now it is practically impossible to be sure of the truth.
"There was only one place that told the pure truth: the story of Gnosticism going right back to the Garden of Eden and up to the siege of Montségur. It was the Cathar Bible, one of the two great treasures
smuggled out of Montségur before it fell into Catholic crusaders. The treasures were buried in separate locations. The Bible was hidden in a cave somewhere
in the Sabartez Mountains. Crusaders captured the knight who hid it before he could reveal the location to other Cathars. He was taken in front of the Inquisition and tortured, but nothing really came of it. They burned him
at the stake."
"So he was lost forever?"
"As it turns out, no. It turned two centuries ago in Carcassonne. It is now in
Yale University Rare Book Library.
"In that case, what's the matter?"
'It has been dubbed the most mysterious manuscript in the world. In fact, it has become a kind of Holy Grail. Codebreakers and cryptographers around the world revere this book above all others. They have no idea that it belonged to the Cathars. They call it the Voynich manuscript, after the man who brought it to public attention.

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Experts say there's nothing like it. It is written in an unknown script and contains numerous inexplicable illustrations. No one has come close to deciphering it. '
"So how do you know what the Cathars' Bible is?'
"We have other Cathar documents. They are written in the same script and contain similar illustrations. The problem is that only the elite brotherhood that led the Cathars knew the language, and they were all killed, most of them in Montségur.

'The Knights Templar took over where the Cathars left. They created a new fraternity and were able to reunite much of what was lost, but not all. The simple fact is that there are holes in our knowledge. Us

trying to fill in the gaps as best we can, but it's never easy. The Templars themselves were largely exterminated, and once-vital pieces of the puzzle were lost. Which, ultimately, was why Hitler failed. He acted on false information. He used fake Grail Hallows. But he doesn't doubt the authenticity of the Spear of Destiny for a second. "

"What makes you think you can do better than Hitler?
"Because a member of our organization rediscovered one of our most valuable treasures - Raphael's mural. The mural was Julius II's attempt to preserve our beliefs, but it disappeared from our consciousness for centuries because it was so inaccessible. Of course, the mural took-us to you.
"But you said that I might be deceiving you, that I was a false Messiah. Something else occurred to Lucy. If everything Morson said about reincarnation were true, a mechanism might exist to rediscover lost history. If you could tune in to the memories of their former souls, the past would open like a book.Perhaps the Cathars' knowledge of the Bible had not gone away forever.

Maybe someone with the right soul-line could retrieve it.
Perhaps some souls had a much superior ability to remember their previous existences. Perhaps they were so in tune with their soul lines, so able to acquire knowledge and insights from them, that they might appear to possess magical powers. Could it be possible that someone like Nostradamus did not so much see the future as predict how souls were likely to behave in the future? If a soul, like that of Emperor Titus, had a mortal hatred of the Jews, would it not be logical to predict that the same soul, in the future, would persecute the Jews with the same passion, but with greater resources at its disposal? That, then, would be a prediction of the rise of Hitler and the creation of death camps... but it would not be a matter of seeing the future so much as projecting the past into the future.

“There’s no turning back now,” Morson said. "Besides, you've already brought us the Sword of Destiny."

'It's just a sword,' Lucy objected. 'You don't know if it's special or not.' 'But I do.
Most people, if they were faking the Sword of Destiny, would have already tried using some medieval sword supposedly linked to King Arthur. They don't realize that the Sword of Destiny had no connection to Arthur. It was the sword used to behead John the Baptist. It's an ancient sword from the time of the Roman occupation of Judea - exactly what you brought us. I am not

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I have no doubt that it is authentic. "
'What sword did Hitler think belonged to the Hallows Grail? "
"I think I mentioned it before: the Sword of St. Maurice. It was kept among the Imperial Regalia of the Holy Roman Empire, as a partner to the Spear of Destiny itself, sometimes called the Spear of St. Maurice. Maurice , or Maurice to give him his Roman name, was the commander of the Theban Legion. He and his men were Christians. In 285 AD, the emperor Diocletian, who despised Christianity, ordered the legion to be decimated unless they abandoned their beliefs. Maurice refused to comply with the order and so did his men. The entire legion was then executed. The Church made Maurice a saint for his supreme sacrifice.
'Maurice was said to have possessed the Spear of Destiny when he led the Theban Legion, so the theory arose that his sword may also be sacred.
Like an ancient Roman sword, it looked similar to what you found. This, of course, is the problem. It is very difficult to separate genuine ones from look-alikes and fakes. The Spear of St Maurice was genuine, the Sword of St Maurice just an ordinary soldier.

Lucy was amazed at how complicated this all was. Was there any real chance of gathering the real Hallows Grail? It seemed impossible. Maybe that wasn't a bad thing, but his intellectual curiosity was growing. What would happen if the genuine Relics were actually assembled? Would it be a supreme moment of destiny? She almost expected it to happen.

But everything related to the Hallows Grail was codified. In fact, it was probably the most elaborate code ever created by humanity. It had to be since the Gnostics' enemies were so cruel. The Cathars and Templars were practically exterminated by the Catholic Church. Tens of thousands of people died. For secrets to survive the Inquisition, they had to be so good that those who kept them hardly knew what they were hiding. The safest secret was one that no one knew was a secret.
The Grail stories had achieved this status.
Every part of the tale had pitfalls. Many people thought that the sword that King Arthur drew from the stone to prove his legitimacy was Excalibur.

In fact, the sword in the stone and Excalibur were two completely different things. The Lady of the Lake gave Excalibur to Arthur. The sword in the stone conferred legitimacy, Excalibur mystical power. The sword in the stone reflects a real, physical sword, while Excalibur was a symbolic, spiritual sword. Almost everything in the Grail Romances was performed on both a literal and symbolic level.

The Lady of the Lake was the symbolic representation of Sophia, the personification of Gnostic wisdom. The lake was the pool of mystical knowledge - Gnosis. Excalibur represented the sword of Gnostic truth that cut through the lies of other religions and led to the merit of Gnosis. If you died before reaching Gnosis, you had to return the sword. That was Arthur's last act was to ask Sir Bedivere to throw Excalibur back into the lake.
He had failed to achieve Gnosis because of his obsession with Guinevere, and his personal failure.

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More would lose underlying meaning of the story. They would take Legend of the
Grail at face value, as a romantic story, and nothing more. But even when you thought you understood what was really going on, you usually discover that there was an even deeper layer. It was the last Russian doll. Was there anyone alive who knew the identity of the final doll in the collection?

Lucy looked at Morson. She had missed something, hadn't she?

"You said that two treasures were removed from Montségur. You only mentioned the Cathar Bible. What was the other?
Morson swept a hand over his short hair. 'The brotherhood found at the end of the 19th century in the French village of Rennes-le-Château. It's in a safe place now.
"What is that? '
"Something so wonderful that it is beyond human imagination." His face became hard. "And he will prove once and for all whether you are a false Messiah.

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ucy had been given a mat to lie on. She was exhausted, but she couldn't sleep.
Every time she closed her eyes, they opened again moments later.
His gaze continued to drift toward the lantern Morson had placed in the half-demolished altar, now the only light in the chapel. He ordered everyone to get a few hours of sleep before departing at dawn for their next destination.
He had given no indication of what this might be.
Lucy saw the light reflecting off the lid of her father's coffin. She couldn't decide whether she was shocked or comforted knowing her father's body was so close. As for James, she was just as indecisive about their closeness. Part of her felt euphoric, while the other part was terrified. Raking over her old feelings was the last thing she wanted to do. She wouldn't know what to say to him. The words would dry in her mouth as she tried to communicate how much she still cared for him, as she fought to avoid being sucked back into the horrors of the world.

love.

How could anyone sleep well in times like these? How many hours of life were left? She kept asking me about the second of the Cathar treasures. What could it be? Some said it was the Holy Grail itself, but the Cathars hated all material objects. The Bible was OK as the first treasure because it had immaterial value.

Could the second be another source of knowledge? An earth-shattering secret, perhaps?
Morson said it was something that could prove whether or not she was a false Messiah. How could she be false when she never claimed to be the Messiah in the first place? Morson had clearly meant it as a threat. What does he intend to do if she failed his test?

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A soldier was looking at Lucy, his hand clamped over her mouth to stop her from screaming. He didn't say anything, just gestured towards one of the small side rooms. She realized that she must have fallen asleep. Now, instantly, I was fully alert.

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In the dim light, I could see Gresnick, Sinclair, and James standing in the doorway. The other soldiers were sleeping. What was happening?

She tiptoes to the other room. The soldier who had woken her followed, carefully closing the door behind him.
"I'm the only guard on the clock," he whispered. "Drill me as hard as you can," he said to Gresnick, 'then tie me up. I opened the side door. You can escape this way. You'll probably have half an hour before they find out you're gone. Take my flashlight.

Without hesitation, Gresnick charged forward and struck the soldier's jaw. The soldier fell to the ground. Gresnick quickly tied it up. "Let's get out of here."
They sneaked through the side door and out into the freezing night. Snow still covered the ground.
Lucy felt bad. Something was out there, the same presence she felt in Tintagel. She was certain it was something not of this world, and the thought terrified her. She tried to block out all awareness of the thing.

The hearse was still there, the horses tied to a fence and shivering from the cold.
'Get in the back. Gresnick pointed to the hearse with his flashlight. "I can drive one of those things."

Cardinal Sinclair climbed on top while Gresnick untied the horses, petting them to keep them still.
Awkwardly, Lucy climbed into the back with James. It was scary to be in the same place where his father's coffin once rested. It was even scarier to stay with Tiago. She had no idea what to say to him, and he was so hesitant. He struggled to even look at her. It amazed him that he was in a fit enough state to be here. The last time she saw him, amid the helicopter wreckage at Tintagel, she was convinced he was dying.

The carriage moved away, the sound muffled by the snow. It was so dark that it was practically impossible to see ahead. A small, bright light stood out in the northern sky. Lucy shivered. Was it Merica from Morson?

James had his back to her, breathing hard. She wondered if she should reach out to him, maybe put a hand on his shoulder. What would it be like to play it again? But she couldn't, not after the way she treated him. Should she apologize? Tell him it was all a mistake? She had no idea what to do and walked away.

The car swayed from side to side as they found a bumpy path through the woods and down the steep slope of Cadbury Castle.
She wanted to know who had helped her escape. Some kind of double agent? It must have been the same person who handcuffed Gresnick earlier that night. Perhaps the soldier had doubts about Morson's plans. Another thought occurred to him. Maybe it wasn't such a good thing to have escaped.
MORSON's religious views were vile, but also difficult to disagree with. It was so hard to know what to think. Good and evil were fusion.

'That soldier back there,' Gresnick said eventually. 'He worked for the DIA a couple of years ago. He said he recognized me. He couldn't go along with the others because

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more time. He said they were going "too far, too crazy." Recently, he met a girl back home. He changed his perspective on things. "
Lucy frowned. It was all so sadly predictable. Love, the axis around which everything revolved. She doesn't think the soldier had much of a future. Morson was sure to discover him.

She asked where they were going. To the nearest military base, the nearest city? Glastonbury didn't get very far. Maybe she'll end up back at her convent. Wherever they were going, it would be difficult to get there. There were no lights on the road and the snow was blowing in the wind.

After a few minutes, the transport stopped. Gresnick pointed the torch at a sign at a roundabout.

“We can go to either Glastonbury or Cheddar,” he shouted. "Which way, Lucy?"
For a second, she was speechless. Why was Gresnick asking her? It's not like that Not long ago, he pointed a pistol at her head. 'Are you sure you want me to decide?

'This is all about you, Lucy. I trust you to do the right thing.
Do the right thing? Lucy had no idea what it was. She was operating on pure instinct now. To return to Glastonbury was to go back to your cell, to close the door and wait for the end. There was a time in the last twenty-four hours when it would have been his preferred choice. Now, she wanted something more.
Closing - of who she was, Rafael's mural, of whatever paper Morson claimed was hers.

"Cheddar," she said. 'There is a famous Gorge there which I visited as a child. "She looked up at the bright star in the sky. "And it contains a cave called King Solomon's Temple. "

hey it was moving for over an hour. There were no signs of pursuit. Lucy expected to see rockets explode in the sky and hear the sound of MORSON trucks, but there
was nothing. The snow didn't give up. This meant that it would be impossible to follow their tracks. She wondered if Morson knew how to go to Cheddar Gorge, or if he was waiting for her to
choose Glastonbury as the next logical step.

They were making slow progress in the dark and heavy snow. Fortunately, Gresnick managed to turn on a couple of lamps on the side of the hearse, so they had just enough light to see which way to go, but the main road had disappeared beneath the snow. Gresnick couldn't be sure he was going the right way.

Lucy counted that they had put about four or five miles between them and the chapel, enough to make it unlikely Morson would find them, at least until morning.
This part of the country mostly made up of fields and woods, so she wasn't surprised when they started to make their way through the edge of a forest.

She sat, curled into a ball, hugging her knees together and staring straight ahead. The entire time, she was aware of James. He was lying on his side, sleeping. She wasn't relishing the moment when they got to talk. With all its history, each

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word would be loaded with unspoken meanings. It had been that way for a long time since her last language was deciphered like that, the words that were all between the lines and practically insignificant on the surface. As the car made its way
through the trees, the road became narrower.
They had probably strayed from the main road and onto a country trail. Maybe they were going in the wrong direction. How could they tell? They may need to stop and wait until morning to find their bearings.

As they moved deeper into the forest, Lucy shrank even more. She was sure they were being watched from the trees. Strange sounds broke all around. She imagined the forest floor had come to life, and
millions of insects were crawling toward them.

The trail disappeared and a dense screen of trees blocked his path. The carriage
stopped.
"We can't go any further tonight," Gresnick said.
'We'll freeze,' Cardinal Sinclair objected. 'We need to light a fire, find some suitable shelter.

Gresnick nodded. "I'll do a reccy, see if I can find a better place."
Lucy got out of the back of the car and stood shivering in the dark. The trees swayed in the wind. Its branches continued making strange, creaking noises. She had never been
anywhere so scary.
Sinclair came over, rubbing his hands. "Hungry? I found a packed lunch stuffed under the driver's seat: a couple of sandwiches, some chocolate bars, a couple of bags of peanuts
and a box of oranges."
"Not now," Lucy said.
"How are you holding up? You've been off your medication for a while. Are you feeling a little strange?"

"I am fine."
"What about James?" He is sleeping. "
'Let's let him rest.'
'Cardinal, I never got the chance to thank you properly for what you did for me back at Tintagel. You saved my life. '
"It was for the good of all of us, Lucy. There's only one thing Morson and I agree on:
you are destiny's child."

Lucy couldn't help but smile. When she was a teenager, she used to hear a girl from a band with that name. She and her friends learned all their dance moves, using them to terrorize boys at school discos.

'What do you think will happen next? " She asked. "We are all in God's hands now.

"Do you believe that God would destroy the world to stop Morson from doing whatever he
is planning?"
"God once drowned the world, Lucy. Only Noah and his ark were saved. Why should he let anyone survive this hour? If he doesn't spare us, it will be thanks to you."
'But I have no idea what I'm expected to do.'
"Just be yourself. That's all anyone can ask for."
Gresnick walked back out of the forest, his torchbeam piercing the dark. "I found it somewhere. It looks like a ruined abbey. There's a room with a fireplace. We can stay there

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for the rest of the night and left at dawn.
They found a sheltered spot where they tied the horses.
'Come on, Mr. Vernon,' Gresnick said, waking James, 'we have to move forward.
Lucy watched dryly as James emerged from the back of the car, a confused look on his face.
He quickly glanced at her, then turned away again.
After tethering the horses, Gresnick led the way through the trees, his boots sinking into the flaky snow.

"God has mercy on us." Sinclair stopped abruptly.
'What is that?' Gresnick spun around. 'Did you see anything?'
"There are wolves in the forest. They are everywhere, looking at us. They have glowing yellow eyes.

They all stopped. Lucy looked into the darkness. Sinclair was right. There were yellow eyes all around him.
But this was crazy: England didn't have any wolves. They were hunted to extinction a long time ago.

"Why are they so quiet?" Gresnick whispered. "They don't move a muscle.
Sinclair fiddled with the crucifix around his neck. "It's like they're waiting for someone - something - to give them orders.'
'Let's get moving,' Gresnick said.
The ruined abbey was a few meters ahead, in a clearing near a stream. The light of Gresnick's torch reflected in the dark water. Drops of snow sprinkled the surface, merging with it. It made Lucy think of white confetti bathing down on the freshly laid asphalt.

A cemetery full of snow-covered tombstones stood in front of the abbey. They had to cross it to get to the room's entrance, Gresnick mentioned. Made of sandstone, with a
hole in one corner of the ceiling, the room had a large fireplace with blocks of old
chopped wood stacked in front of it. The back door led to other rooms in the abbey. Gresnick checked them with his torch.

'They're safe,' he said. 'They're all like this: holes in the ceiling and some gaps in the walls, but there's no way wolves can get in. There's even a toilet - well, a room with a hole in the floor.

'We need to barricade ourselves,' said Sinclair. 'Then we can light the fire and settle down for the night.'

Gresnick and James found some boxes and jammed them into the door.
Lucy had the opportunity to visit the bathroom. It was as unpleasant as Gresnick had implied.

Gresnick used a lighter to light the firewood. It didn't take long to get a good fire going. The crackling wood mesmerized Lucy. She stood close to him, holding out her hands toward the flames. It seemed like a miracle to have found this place in the forest, a sanctuary from all the madness.

"Have you ever heard of the story of Kafka and his friend Max Brod?" she asked Gresnick.
"They were discussing hope, or rather, Kafka's lack of it.
"No, what did they say?
"I think a lot about that. Brod asked if there was any room for hope in Kafka's dark world. Kafka replied, "Oh, so much hope, an infinite amount of hope - but not for us." I can't take those words from my mind".

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Gresnick nodded. "I can see why." He brought his head down towards her. "What about you - you think there's no hope" leaning towards her, he gently placed his hands on her arms and held her for a moment.

She looked at him and didn't know how to respond. Once again, she was aware of how attractive she found him, and how wrong it was. She wanted him to put his arms around her right and hold her, protect her. A shiver ran through. How could she be so disloyal to James? "I'm tired," she said, walking away.

Gresnick reached out and grabbed his arm. "Wait, there's something I have to tell you."

Lucy looked at him. 'What?'
"I lied to you," he said. “James never said anything about killing him. I… I don't know why I said that.” He looked at the floor. 'I'm ashamed of myself.
Lucy was horrified. 'How could you do such a thing?'
Gresnick shuffled uneasily. "When I met you, I didn't expect... He couldn't look Lucy in the eye. After an awkward pause, he said, 'I think I was jealous of James.

'I can't hear this.' Lucy freed herself from Gresnick's grasp then quickly placed herself in front of the fire.

Struggling to get comfortable on the hard stone floor, she spun around. His mind was flooding with alternating images of Gresnick and James. She was so confused. Part of her wasn't as disgusted with Gresnick's revelation as should have been the case. He wanted to say he was attracted to her, didn't he? She doesn't like the idea.

She had only managed to keep her eyes closed for a few seconds when the noise began: the howl of wolves, a primal sound, as if

the earth was traveling back in time. His howl was so loud she thought it would carry for miles. She prayed Morson and his men wouldn't listen.
James got to his feet. "Someone will have to stand guard. We have to make sure those wolves don't get any closer. I'll take the first watch."
'He is sure?' Gresnick asked.
'Yes.' James looked at Lucy. 'Besides, I need to clear my head. "

Ames took Gresnick's torch and entered the next room. Your worst fears coming true. Lucy was very friendly with Gresnick - he had undoubtedly seen an unmistakable look of lust, even love, on Lucy's face when she let Gresnick put his hands on her just moments before - and there was no ambiguity at all. about the way Gresnick looked at her.

Aggressively, he swept the torch around the ruins of the abbey. Ruined love. In the end, everything falls apart. Instead of joy at seeing Lucy again, it was experiencing something different, new and totally unexpected. Hatred. Hatred because she rejected him, because she had such power over him, because she was so perfect.
Most of all, he hated her for being able to feel love for others. Was she already falling for Gresnick with his good Hollywood looks and his knowledge of the same obscure subjects that she liked? In many

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In all respects, they were a perfect match, and that was... unacceptable.
He aimed the torchbeam in the corner of the room. A mouse looked
at him. He picked up a stone and threw it at the worms, making haste away. The stone hit
something metallic and he went there to see what it was. He picked up a pocket knife, in good
condition. He opened the blade and played. For a second, he stroked it, then abruptly jabbed
it into his hand. Blood appeared. Christ, what am I doing? He wondered if something had
happened to his brain in the helicopter crash, some subtle injury that was causing his behavior to
change. He felt an anger within himself that he had never experienced before. He was scary.

It was so cold here, away from the fire. Shards of ice were growing inside him, jagging into
his heart. Why was it that we only loved those who fled? They had a magical
glow that time could not diminish, unlike those that stayed with us for too long and became
obsolete. His skin that once seemed so golden and untarnishable very quickly corroded - second-
hand goods with no trade-in value. What price can we not pay to bring back those who left us
before we noticed the first rust stains?

Lucy was more beautiful than ever, even in her white military uniforms. At the back of the chapel
in Cadbury, she looked so different from everyone else.
They all had camouflage uniforms, while she looked ghostly - or perhaps holy was the right
word: pure and virginal among the hardened warriors.
He felt how uncomfortable he felt with him in the back of the car.
She didn't even say a word to him - and if he was being honest, he couldn't talk to her either - so
he pretended to sleep. Every second pressed down on him like slabs of stone on his chest.

It was not long, in this Gothic abbey, for the words of Keats's Gothic poem that so haunted him like
a schoolboy to return to him. La Belle Dame Sans Merci - the
mercilessly beautiful woman - the perfect description of Lucy.

What could be troubling you, Knight in arms, Alone and slowly passing by?

The hedges have dried up from the lake, And no birds sing.

What can be troubling you, Knight in Arms, so dejected and so on?

He could easily be about himself. No one ever mentioned the many knights who sought
the Holy Grail, but found it nowhere. He was one of them, the ones who never made it, and the
ones who were killed, lost, gone mad: the losers and the failures no one spoke of, whose
names no one remembered. Lucy was his Grail and she was more his now than ever. It was
impossible to believe that there was a time when he held her in her arms, made love to her,
spent as much time as he wanted with her.
The past was a mirage. He wished he could set fire to his memories.
He walked to the far wall, and looked out into a space where there must have been a stained glass window. No
sign of the wolves. If they were still out there, they weren't making any sounds. There was no noise
other than the faint crackling of wood in the fireplace in the next room.

He repeated a line from Keats's poem, which he found most poignant:

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And no birds sing. It was like this for a long time since he last heard birdsong. There was nothing he wouldn't give to hear just a few seconds of a bird singing: a sign that life was normal, that the nightmare could end.
What happened to Kruger? All those dead men back there, killed by Lucifer. It seemed absurd to acknowledge that Beelzebub was actually alive and on earth.
Was it the creature in the forest now? Lord of wolves, master of dark places.
Would it be possible to defeat him? Maybe only an angel like Lucy could do it.
Sweeping the torch around him once again, he imagined that the shadows were conspiring against him, that he had to kill them by stabbing his torch into them. There were so many strange shapes. This abbey was like one of those spooky ruins that vampires liked to colonize. It was easy to imagine their coffins in the crypt.

In its time, the abbey must have been a sight, a beautiful stone building beside a babbling brook in the middle of a forest. You could not

get somewhere more picturesque. The monks who lived here must have found it an inspiring place. They could commune with nature, have as much isolation as they desired. However, even this idyll collapsed, the walls collapsing, leaving a shell with just a couple of rooms intact.
He crept back into the other room, watching the dancing shadows cast by the fire, like the restlessness in his own heart. Could it be that he was never able to talk to Lucy properly? Or was she too worried about Gresnick now? It seemed incredible that she was so friendly to a man who had made it clear he was going to kill her. Should he tell her that Gresnick promised to kill her if she came with him? Gresnick went cold-blooded. How could Lucy be falling for her act? That ridiculously perfect smile of his. He was so fake.

Peering through a red pane of glass in a broken window, James saw something that made him think an icy hand had taken hold of his heart.
Lucy was lying on her back next to the fire. Gresnick was leaning over her, his hand gently stroking her arm. The angle wasn't good enough for him to see clearly, but he could swear Gresnick was kissing. The American's hand wasn't being pushed away by Lucy. There was no denying the physical intimacy between the two.
How could Lucy betray him like that? All those years of torturing yourself, for what? OK, he was married, but only because Lucy rejected him.
She was the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. That had never changed, not once. Women cannot love in the same way as men. They don't have that burning quality, the fire in the soul. Their aim is to humiliate men, to neutralize them like dogs.

Now he understood why the grandparents and parents of Delta Force defectors had opted for only male offspring. Who could put any trust in women? It was a contradiction in terms. Fickle, proteinaceous, they slip through whatever net you used to catch them. They themselves had no idea what they were, and they didn't even care. And the whole test tube babies thing was clear too. Most Gnostics detested sex, seeing it as Satan's worst instrument, the mechanism by which new souls were delivered into this hell. Thus, the test tube technique saved him from having to perform the act that most

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insulted.
James turned around, wanting to vomit. Had Lucy returned Gresnick's kiss?
She loved the North American, didn't she? He couldn't let this abomination of love flourish. He had to stop this. A tremor passed through him as he realized there was nothing he wouldn't do to stop Gresnick. To stop Lucy loving someone.
Only then can the birds sing again.

66

hen Lucy woke up, it took her a few moments to remember where she was. The fire was still burning and Gresnick and Sinclair were

stretched out in front of him, sleeping. New World Style of Dawn was throwing its usual red light into the room. Lucy doesn't think she's ever gotten used to it.
She felt a tingling at the back of her neck, and twisted around to see if there was anything behind it. For a moment, she thought she glimpsed a figure looking at her through a shattered pane of glass.

"James?
There was no response. She got up and went to the next room. Patches of red light fell to the ground through the holes in the roof. The door was open, in the corner. James was there, his back to her.

He felt uncomfortable. If she comes back and wakes the others? She still couldn't think of anything to say to James. There are no words that seemed to have the correct form. They lacked
the meanings she wanted to convey. She wanted to hug him, yet at the same time, the thought of being in physical contact with him made her squirm. She had buried her love for him as deep as
she could, but he was always there, always asking why she turned her back. The reason was
obvious enough. Love was a form of death. In the end, love died or the loved one died, so why put up with it?
Despite herself, she found herself heading for the door. She stopped just behind James. It doesn't turn around.

"There's something beautiful about that light," James said after a moment, and then entered the small covered garden next to the abbey. Lucy followed, her
breath condensing in the cold air. The grass and flowers were covered in snow. An
ancient fountain, miraculously in full working order, sent a cloud of water into the air, the water-droplets glowing red with the sun. James wandered round to the opposite side. Lucy stayed where she was.
She still loved him, but her heart was as frozen as this garden. The things she wanted to say were
locked inside, holding on to what little heat remained.

"The soldier who freed us last night - you won't believe what he told me,' James said. "He was a born traitor, he said. He told me that in previous lives he was Brutus, Benedict Arnold, even
Judas himself. He couldn't control himself. Each group must have a traitor. He was a puppet, destined to betray his comrades. How can anyone believe such a thing about themselves? None of us are fated to do anything. You know that, don't you

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Is it, Lucy? "
Lucy didn't respond. Gresnick's version of what the soldier said was much more plausible. Why does the soldier tell a different story to James? Then again, why not? If he were the reincarnation of Judas, he might have any number of double tales to tell. Anyway, according to Morson, she was even more of a puppet than a soldier.

“What happened to Sergeant Kruger?” she asked.
"He was still alive when I left him. For your sake, I hope he's dead. Why are you saying a terrible thing like that?"

"Because he swore to kill you. If he's alive, he'll find you."
Lucy turned and they marched to the center of the garden, stopping in front of a thorny bush. A single, absurd, red rose was poking through the thin covering of snow. Crouching down to smell it, she lets the aroma overwhelm her. She held one of the petals between her fingers. The feeling of it, the texture, was exquisite. For a second, she could forget.

At the back of the garden was the small cemetery that had fallen into place the night before. There was something about cemeteries that made them so much more poignant when they were under the snow. Everything was more glaring, more in keeping with death. As Lucy walked among the tombstones of the monks who lived and worked here, she thought of her father. Had Morson gone ahead with his plan and burned the body on an open-air pyre atop Cadbury Castle? It would have been a spectacular sight. The best way to celebrate your father.

Returning to the fountain, she placed her hand in the water, then instantly grabbed it back. She looked down and felt sick - the water was full of dead fish floating on the surface.

"It doesn't make sense, does it?" James said. He stood in front of her, his body hidden behind the ornamental marble angel that formed the fountain's centerpiece. "I mean, it's cold, but the water in the fountain isn't cold anymore. How does this source work, anyway? I bet it hasn't worked for centuries. "
"Dead fish," Lucy grumbled, pointing.
"Everything dies." James' voice sounded so strained. Lucy deliberately kept her head behind the angel.
'I thought I had found someone,' James said.
'What?'
"When you said you didn't want to see me anymore in your letter." Lucy tilted her head.
"But there was no one, was there?"
Lucy recalled one of her conversations with Gresnick. He said he had seen a DIA intelligence report on her, covering everything that had happened to her in the past year. James must have seen this too. A thin file. She had done nothing except have a breakdown.

'What about you?' she asked. "Is there anyone in particular?" She wasn't sure what she wanted the answer to be. An emphatic yes and, simultaneously, an equally emphatic no. Then she could remain frozen. For the past six months, she had lived in a glass world where nothing had changed. He comforted her. Nothing got worse, the scariest nightmares were kept at bay.

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There was a long pause. A long time? Enough time? "Nobody special.

****

James wanted to throw up in the fountain. Lucy had reduced him to a liar, made him deny his wife and their beautiful baby. Somehow, he was inside Keats's poem, living it, breathing it. He remembered one line in particular: Full beautiful, a young fairy. Was that Lucy? And, of course, the line that haunted the most: And no birds sing. Lucy was the one who stopped her from singing.

Despite all this, he couldn't find it in himself to stop loving her.
He remembered what one of his friends once said to him after he was moaning a lot on a drunken night out: "The only haunted house you'll ever enter, James, is your own past. All ghosts are personal." , and no one ever leaves.
Everything was on hold until he dealt with Lucy, one way or another. His life had slipped away from him. He felt as if he were receiving news from a distant land, about someone he didn't know. Nothing was scarier than the fact that the person who was your best friend, your soulmate, could become unrecognizable to you in the blink of an eye. With just a few words, they could kill your happiness.

The ancient Greeks said you shouldn't eat your own heart. He never understood what it meant, until Lucy didn't let him: if you bottle all the above, if you don't trust someone, you'll end up consuming yourself.
'I haven't seen any sign of wolves,' he said. 'We should go away again.' He pointed to the sky. 'Do you see that bright light up there? I saw it for the first time last night.

Lucy nodded. 'Me too. This made me think of Star of Bethlehem. Maybe someone special was born somewhere in England. "
James looked hard. "I swear it's getting bigger and bigger."

67

alf an hour later they were on the road again. All the wolves were gone, just as James had said. Lucy was worried the creatures may have attacked the horses during the night, but the horses were right where they left them, cold but fine. She and Sinclair climbed into the back of the car, while James sat in the front with Gresnick. It was a relief to be separated from James. The atmosphere between them was like Chinese water torture, each drop inflicting agony. She wanted to go back in time to when she could hold his hand without giving him a second thought, when they sat for hours without saying a word and not feeling a trace of self-consciousness.

They discovered a route through the forest and soon reached a sign for Cheddar Gorge, saying it was 15 miles away. As Gresnick led the horses forward, Lucy looked back toward the forest. In the pale red light

morning, with snow covering the treetops and the ruined Abbey peering out, was absolutely magical.

Neither of them spoke as the car crawled forward. Hours passed as they made slow progress towards their destination. They found an old barn

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with bales of hay and were able to feed the horses and get them out of the cold for a while. There was running water, and they all had a drink. After a fifteen minute break, they set off again.

Lucy kept waiting to hear the engines of the MORSON trucks, but the sound never came. The occasional snort of the horses and their heavy breathing were the only sounds
that broke the silence. Further along, Gresnick said he saw a flash of light, as if the sun was reflecting off a mirror or the lens of something...perhaps binoculars.

'Morson? Sinclair asked. "He must have seen us. 'I don't know,' Gresnick said. "Maybe it was nothing."

Lucy felt uncomfortable. For a while, she had the feeling they were being followed. Not by Morson and not by anything supernatural. She didn't say anything, but she feared he was Kruger's brother.

In the middle of the afternoon, a strange landscape materialized in front of them. To the left was a desert of black sand, snowless and stark. Ahead were mountain slopes covered with
huge boulders and pebbles, the ridges covered in snow. To the right, an impenetrable forest of black trees, covered in snow on one side, without a trace of snow on the other. Why was snow lying in
some places but not others? Lucy didn't know the land contained England like this. But the hills were familiar enough - the Mendips, through which Cheddar Gorge tore from his path.

The car stopped at a designated picnic area for tourists. They all went out to stretch their legs and the men went for a bathroom break. Lucy, dehydrated and hungry, doesn't feel any need. He stood up and
looked at the dark terrain.
When the men had returned, they debated what to do next. It appeared that a landslide had cut off the main route through the Mendips. James was more of an information point who provided a great map of the local area. He confirmed that the main road shown on the map was exactly where the landslide occurred. They would have to find another way.

"There's a clue over the hills," James said. “He'll take us straight to Cheddar Gorge.

Lucy looked at the hills in front of them. They didn't look inviting. "Is there no other way?" Gresnick asked.
"A long way round?
"There are two other possible paths. One is about a mile away and the other is another ten miles."

"We can rule out the six-mile trip," Gresnick said. "The other one looks perfect.

"What if there was a landslide there too?" James objected. “Maybe walking is the best bet right now. According to this map, we're only a couple of miles from the center of the Gorge.

'I'm not going hill-walking,' said Sinclair. 'Let's try another way.'
James shook his head. "What makes you think which path will be in any condition better than the one before us?"
Their bickering voices gave Lucy a headache. She turned and went over to one
of the picnic tables. Flopping onto a wooden bench, she sighed, then looked at James. When they went out together they never argued.

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The others eventually came to join her.
"We agreed to meet here in an hour," James said. 'I'll go up the hilltrack to see if there's a clear route. The others are taking the car to check the nearby road. " He held out his hand. "You can come with me if you want, Lucy.
She saw how eager he was for her to say yes. It was such a simple word to say, but often the hardest.
"I'm tired," she said weakly. "I guess I'll have to take the car." Seeing how overwhelmed James looked, she tilted her head and
looked at the top of the picnic table, as if it were the most interesting object in the world.

'Christ! Gresnick shouted.
Lucy looked up. Further north, the bright light I had seen before was much larger, practically a second sun.

'This is heading straight for us,' Sinclair bellowed.
The light in the sky had turned into an enormous fireball traveling obliquely at an incredible speed, through the atmosphere, leaving a fiery trail in its wake. There was no doubt that it was on a collision
course with the earth.
Without warning, a light illuminated the horizon and the air warped into a vast shimmering heat haze. For an instant, it was as if the sky were a separate room.
Seconds later, there came a bang accompanied by a burning, furious wind, so strong that
it knocked them over. Gravel-sized stones spilled everywhere.

When the worst was over, they all slowly got back to their feet. A vast column of smoke was visible in the distance. There was no trace of the fireball any longer.

'My God, what happened?' Sinclair's voice was shaking.
"I think it was an asteroid," James said. "I remember reading about this sort of thing. An asteroid exploded in the air over Siberia a century ago.
Witnesses said there was a blinding light followed by deafening thunder.
They were knocked off their feet by the wind. It was later estimated that trees were destroyed
over an area of 800 square miles. If it had happened over a large city, it would have been like a thousand atomic bombs going off.
Everyone looked at each other. Birmingham and its satellite cities, with a population of several million, have not gone that far.
'Let's get moving,' Gresnick said. 'I don't think we have much time.

ucy squeezed into the same place as Cardinal Sinclair as they set off again. She twisted her gaze back to James as she marched up the hill. He looked so helpless.

"That says you found Cadbury there," said Sinclair. "We need to understand what meaning it has. Why was Hitler so interested in the Spear of Destiny? How does the spear he took from
Vienna relate to his spear?

"My grandfather was obsessed with Wagner's opera Parsifal, 'Gresnick Interrupted.' The Spear of Destiny plays a central role. My grandfather

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thought it proved Wagner was a Grand Master of a Gnostic sect. "My father loved listening to Wagner too, said Lucy.
'Wagner wasn't to my taste.' Cardinal Sinclair grimaced. 'I assume Parsifal is about Percival, the knight who found the Holy Grail. Where does Spear of Destiny fit in? "

The horses had practically stopped and Gresnick had to force them to with a whip.
'Wagner's opera is based on the book Parzival by Wolfram von Eschenbach," he said when they were going at a reasonable pace again. 'It is set in medieval Europe. A mountain castle called Monsalvat overlooks a forest and a beautiful lake in a inaccessible terrain. Monsalvat is the Grail Castle, certainly inspired by the Cathar stronghold at Montségur. The Grail is called King Amfortas and he is served by the Grail Knights, the men who have sworn to protect the Grail with their lives.

"His great enemy is Klingsor, a black magician of the highest rank who once tried to unite the Grail Knights, but was rejected because of his uncontrollable sexual desire. Insanely, Klingsor castrates himself to try to cure his condition, but the Knights still refuse to let him join their Order.
Then, Klingsor becomes their sworn enemy, pledging to do anything to destroy them.

'The Grail Knights guard the Grail Relics, including the Spear of Destiny, but Klingsor manages to steal the Spear and later use it to wound Amfortas in the genitals. It is both a spiritual and physical wound that never heals no matter how many medicines are applied to it.

'From his dark castle, Klingsor, with the power of the Spear flowing through him, dominates all the surrounding lands. Meanwhile, Amfortas finds himself in agony in Grail Castle, tormented by his incurable wound, unable to resist Klingsor and praying for the return of the lost Spear.
'The prophecy says that an innocent fool will find the Spear and heal Amfortas. Parsifal chances over the Grail Castle and is allowed to witness the Grail Keeper's most sacred ceremony. In the great hall of Grail Castle, Amfortas and the Grail Knights prepare to celebrate the Last

Supper, with Parsifal looking on. When Amfortas attempts to remove the veil covering the Holy Grail, the pain from his wound becomes worse than ever.
"When the chalice is discovered, it glows. Parsifal watches the ceremony awkwardly, but does not participate and does not ask Amfortas questions about his wound. Parsifal is then forced to leave the castle and told never to return.
"Klingsor, aware of the prophecy about the innocent knight, guesses Parsifal is the knight in question and lures him to his wondrous castle. In the castle's magical garden, enchanting flower-maidens beg to make love to Parsifal, but he turns them everyone down. Klingsor then uses a beautiful sorceress to try to seduce Parsifal. The sorceress is Kundry, a Jewish witch who was present at Jesus' crucifixion and who he mocked as he hung on the cross. Cursed to live forever because of his crime , she is despicable and tragic. It was she who, with promises of perverted sex, imprisoned Amfortas, which led to the wounding of the Grail King by Klingsor.

"When he kisses Kundry Parsifal, the young knight recoils, but at the same time, he is overcome by deep reflections. He understands why Amfortas

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was tempted, and he feels longing for the Grail king and suffering. The world, he realizes, is an endless circle of pain and despair. Only through compassion and renunciation of the pleasures of the flesh can the circle be broken. He is filled with regret for the lack of mercy he showed at the ceremony at the Grail Castle. Why was he so callous towards the Grail King? Now, he knows what he must do to help Amfortas.

"Klingsor, frustrated, flies in an uncontrollable rage, and throws the Spear of Destiny at Parsifal, but it miraculously stops in mid-air. Parsifal reaches up and grabs him. Just as he does this, Klingsor's castle of enchantments disappears.
"For years, Parsifal struggles in vain to find the Grail Castle once again. He seems to have disappeared from the real world. After many attempts, he allowed one second chance to enter the sacred castle. The castle is filled with darkness, the Knights sunk in despair because they have been deprived for years of the spiritual sustenance provided by the presence of the spear. As Parsifal brings the spear close to Amfortas, the tip begins to bleed and he touches the king's wound with it. Instantly, the king's wound disappears.

"What did your grandfather think the hidden meaning was?" Sinclair asked.
“Parsifal is regarded as a symbol of Christianity, and Klingsor of paganism,” Gresnick said, “and the story is about how the purity and compassion of Christianity triumph over the primitive passions of paganism.

"But a Nazi named Hermann Rauschning claimed that Hitler interpreted Parsifal very differently. Rauschning said he found Hitler's scribbled notes in his program when he first saw Parsifal. Hitler, according to Rauschning, believed it was a story about blood purity - racial hygiene. Amfortas' incurable disease was caused by his perverted sex with a Jew. His blood had mixed with hers and was now eternally stained.
The Grail's sacred task was to protect the purity of Aryan blood. Immaculate blood was the secret of life - the true Holy Grail. Impure blood, racial mixing, on the other hand, was a catastrophe, leading to bestial races driven by primal, degenerating instincts.

'Klingsor's enchanted castle was the world of temptation, where pure Aryan blood was in danger of being contaminated by non-Aryans. Parsifal was the great hero because his blood was never corrupted. He was able to resist Klingsor's pleases and Kundry's offers of wild sex. The recovery of the Spear was the restoration of Aryan purity. Amfortas sinned by having sexual relations with a Jewish woman. His genitals were the source of his downfall. When the Holy Spear was used to touch his genitals, his blood was miraculously re-purified and he was healed. Grail Castle was the perfect Aryan world. Klingsor's kingdom threatened that purity, and it is the task of all good Aryans to assume the role of the Grail Knights and resist the corruption of their Aryan blood.

"But you don't accept or interpret, do you?" said Sinclair.
Gresnick smiled and shook his head. "My grandfather believes Wagner was a senior figure in a secret German society known as the Order of the New Templars. Strongly Gnostic, the Order of the New Templars believed that

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The Grail Knights were the Knights Templar themselves. Amfortas symbolized
Gnosticism, while Klingsor symbolized Christianity. The Grail Castle was the pure light world of the true God, while the Castle of Wonders was the material world of the Demiurge. Amfortas's incurable wound was the loss of so many souls from heaven to the evil world of matter. It could only be
cured by the return of all souls to heaven. Parsifal's lesson is that only an innocent fool can achieve this, using the Spear of Destiny. The Spear is the key, not the Grail. And...one last
point...it is necessary that blood will be spilled. ""

You think I'm

the innocent fool, don't you? 'Lucy found it difficult to look Gresnick in the
eye.

"A nice, sensitive Catholic girl seized from an asylum? I'm afraid we fit in perfectly.

"And you think I'm going to shed blood, that I'm going to kill someone with a spear?
'Try'.

"But Parsifal didn't kill anyone.

"Let's hope this ends the same way, but I doubt it."
Gresnick turned to Sinclair. 'What if Hitler somehow got it wrong, and the Vienna Spear is a hoax?

"Well, if that's the case, then thanks to Lucy's efforts back at Cadbury, they now have the genuine
Saint Spear of Longinus.
Gresnick scratched his head. “We're missing something, aren't we? All along we've been focusing on the Hallows Grail and practically ignoring anything else of equal, if not greater power.

'The Ark of the Covenant, said Lucy. "But didn't you say it was blown up in front of the White House?

"I don't think that was the real Ark. No one who believed in its power would blow it, and no one who didn't believe in its power would go to all the trouble of stealing it. What if all people say about
it is True, I doubt he could be destroyed anyway. Besides, aren't you under the impression that Morson knows exactly where he is?"

Sinclair nodded. "However, I don't understand where it fits in. The Grail Hallows are associated with Christianity, but the Ark is purely Jewish. It has never been mentioned in the same breath as the 'Hallows.'
You are sure.
"Gresnick said. 'The Ark disappeared from Jewish history long before
Jesus' time. He never laid eyes on it.'
"What's your opinion of the Ark?" Lucy asked Sinclair. 'Do you think this is just a glorified treasure?

"In the Bible, the Ark is a golden coffin that contains not only the Ten Commandments, but also the secrets of Creation itself. It holds the answers to all our questions about where humanity came
from and where we are going.
It is also literally God's throne on earth. Some people go further and say that the Ark is God's portable house: he actually lives inside it. Moses, they point out, could address the Ark directly and say things like,
"Arise, Lord, and let your enemies be scattered and let those who hate you run for their lives before you." God.
That's pretty much how the Jews considered it. That's why they were so obsessed with
him, and why

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haunts them to this day. They never recovered from their loss. "
'Hold on,' Gresnick said. 'Are you saying that to find the Ark is to find God?

"According to the Jews, yes.
Gresnick scratched his head again. 'The Ark and the Spear of Destiny are both said to possess enormous, unimaginable power, the power of God himself. Is this what this is really all
about? The Gnostics are going to do something with the spear and the Ark to release the power of creation. "

"It seems so, doesn't it?" said Sinclair. "Perhaps these Gnostics are planning something so sacrilegious that it will bring the final wrath of God upon us."
"What kind of sacrilege?" Lucy asked.
"That's what we need to work out. But make no mistake, Lucy. Morson is determined to make you part
of it. You must stop him. If you fail, the world will end in a matter of hours."

69

Ames was dragging along a rocky path. He couldn't believe that Lucy had refused to go with him. Was she deliberately torturing him? Always, he was

support, understanding, love, and everything you got in return should be treated like this.
When he reached the top, he turned and looked back. The frozen landscape stretched out before him. It looked like the land of the dead. He could imagine millions of male ghosts as miserable as he were wandering this snowlocked land, their hands shaking with misery, toys of faerychildren like Lucy. They all had the same story to tell, the Keats story told chillingly:

I saw pale kings and princes too, Pale warriors,
pale death they all were; They shouted - "La Belle Dame Sans Merci Ti is on her trail!

I saw your hungry, dark lips, in horrible warnings wide, And I awoke and found myself here, On the cold hillside.

And that's why I stand here Alone and slowly passing by, Though the sedge is withered
from the lake, And no birds sing.

That was exactly where it was - on the cold hillside, without the birdsong: Lucy's world. An impossible word entered his head and, for a second it took his breath away with how absurd, how shocking, it was, a word he couldn't possibly associate with Lucy. However, the word refused to go away, and he realized that something inside him had changed in a most disturbing way. The key had been turned on, an irrevocable switch. The word was so bold in his mind, it might as well be written in the sky for everyone to see.

Just.

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Kruger was right - Lucy was Lucifer's Chosen One. One of the ancient signs was a blazing, destructive light in the sky, much the same as he had seen less than an hour ago.

With his mind harboring increasingly dark thoughts, he resumed his walk and found a small rope bridge crossing a chasm, with a river below.
Near the
bridge was one of those old telescopes he used to find on the seashore as a child, where he could put a coin in and look at passing ships for a minute or two before a shutter came down and everything went black.

On a summer's day, the view from here is sure to be spectacular. For a second, he wished he were a child again, blissfully unaware of creatures like Lucy. He looked through the eyepiece and was surprised to find that it was working perfectly. Someone must have jammed the mechanism.

He swung the telescope in the direction taken by Lucy and the others. It didn't take long to locate his car. When he looked at the terrain in front of them, his mouth dropped open.
Jesus Christ, he thought, what the hell is this?

ook how scared they are. Gresnick struggled to control the horses as they struggled to turn.

'What are these things?' Sinclair could not hide his alarm.
They were confronted by a vast field full of strange vertical spiked structures that resembled flower buds or pods. Each was bright green and taller than a basketball player. It was like an invasion scene from Body Snatchers.

'I saw one of these in Kew Gardens a couple of years ago, said Lucy. "They come from the rainforests of Sumatra.
"So what the hell are they doing in England? Gresnick was still trying hard to pacify the horses.
“I don't remember your first name,” Lucy said, “but your nickname is Corpse Flowers.
When they bloom, they make a terrible stench like the odor of rotting meat. It can take these things up to six years to bloom, and then they keep their bloom for just a couple of days. That's why people are so fascinated by them. Almost all
The world's Botanical Garden has one.
'Look, all the snow is melting around the flowers,' Gresnick said. 'How did it get so warm all of a sudden?'

Lucy was trying to remember all the things she learned about these bizarre flowers. They can metabolize sugars to speed up vaporization and help spread their stench faster. The amount of energy they generated allowed them to produce a temperature several degrees above the temperature of the air.
The horses didn't want to go anywhere near the flowers. They were sniffing frantically, moving away, trying to get back to the way they had come.
"Something is close, said Lucy. 'I felt it before. Something terrible.
'I feel it too.' Sinclair held the crucifix around his neck.

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Lucy expected to see the darkness of the past and the future, the darkness itself, rising from behind the flowers.
As they watched, the structures began to open. They were like strange, organic chimneys belching, putrid odors hot to the air, vapors that attract scavenging insects. Within seconds, the soil around the flowers came to life. The foul odor had brought every
insect from miles around. “Listen,” Gresnick shouted.
There was an extraordinary buzzing sound, as if the air had an electrical current flowing through it. The sky darkened as a cloud of flies appeared over the flowers. The entire area
now smelled of rotting meat. Hundreds

Thousands of flies, perhaps millions, were heading in all directions toward the flowers—huge, rancid beacons of hell.
The odor was incredibly foul now, as if the air was turning to poison. Lucy held her hand over her mouth and nose. The horses reared.
'Get out,' Gresnick shouted. 'I can't hold them any longer.'
Lucy and Sinclair both jumped. Gresnick had to throw himself to safety as the horses ran
away.
'Shit!' The colonel grumbled. "I think we lost for good."
As he and Sinclair watched the car disappear, Lucy walked forward toward the nearest corpse flower. Black beetles were swarming over her feet, but she barely noticed.
She stared, transfixed, at the incredible structure with its velvety brown
interior. Reaching out, he touched the fleshy yellow-trunk upright. Without warning, he collapsed, as if his immense weight was suddenly too much for him. Across the
field, other corpse flowers did the same, withering and dying.

Gresnick walked over and put his arm around Lucy. Come here. This place is dangerous. "

As he spoke, Lucy heard a sinking sound. Tens of thousands of cockroaches emerged from the collapsing innards of the corpse flowers and swarmed toward him.
Black rain tied down, probably an after-effect of the asteroid explosion.

'Run!' Sinclair bellowed.

They ran away from the teeming mass of insects and didn't stop until they were hundreds of feet between each other and the corpse flowers.

Sinclair was exhausted. He vomited a pile of snow onto the side of the road. Lucy leaned over too, holding her knees.
Gresnick pulled vertical. 'Are you well?'
She nodded. The smell of the corpse flowers clung to every part of her. 'Don't go out like that ever again.' Gresnick wrapped her in his arms.
"You are the most precious thing in the world."
Lucy pressed herself against him and kissed him.

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Ames walked away from the telescope, shaking. Without a doubt, now. Lucy was mocking his love for her. She cast a new spell, found a new victim. He

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recalled a biblical injunction: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."
His mind worked fast. The others would have to use this route to get to Cheddar Gorge. He would come down soon to meet them, then bring them up here.
Looking at the rope bridge, he knew what he had to do. Holding the pocket knife he found in the abbey, he walked towards the bridge. He carefully

frayed the bottom of the main support ropes, trying to judge how to ensure it would collapse when someone got on the other side. He would send Lucy across the bridge first. And that would be the end of it.

The hard frost descended as the sun began to descend. Everything was slippery. It would be dark by the time they were ready to cross so no one would notice the damage to the ropes. He looked down at the narrow, winding river far below. Lucy would fall there, the devil's son would fall into the abyss. It was the right - the biblical - ending. And then the birds

sing again.

****

It was a pitch-black night and the temperature was dropping quickly.
'The rope bridge? You didn't say anything about that when you told us about this track. Gresnick stared in disbelief at the rickety structure, as he swung the torch from side to side. "He didn't seem safe.
"We don't have a choice," James said. 'This is the only way to the Gorge. It's a tourist circuit, so it should be OK. "It's either that or a walk for miles to find a suitable ford or bridge over the river," said Sinclair.

'We don't have time. "Lucy had lost patience with all this talk. She looked down into the abyss. The water rushing in made a roar that echoed off the steep cliffs. The thought of crossing that narrow bridge was terrifying.

The full moon, garishly red, threw a strange light over the water. A line of beautiful white swans appeared, making their way up the river. Even in the red-tinted moonlight, they appeared brilliant white, like creatures from another reality.
They were so serene, oblivious to the chaos of the world. Even the river became calmer.
"Let's cross," said Lucy. "You first," James said.
'No, I'll take a look. Gresnick looked at James. "You don't look so good, Vernon. Are you sick?"

"I am fine." But James' hands were shaking uncontrollably.
We don't want to take any chances," Gresnick said, "so no more than one on the bridge at a time, okay?"
He carefully made his way across the five meter long rope bridge.

Lucy prayed nothing could go wrong. James was as intent on the bridge as it was. She looked at him and asked how the hell she could have kissed Gresnick. What was wrong with her? She was so confused. If she confesses? But James would hate her. She wanted to go hand in hand with him. The moment they left together, she loved the way he never left

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He refused her hand when she wanted to hold his. Then some men realized how much women appreciated it.

“Christ, they don't feel safe.” Gresnick was on the other side, looking back anxiously.
“You're next, Vernon.
'No, Lucy next. We need to get her to the other side. "
Lucy shrugged. 'OK'. Cautiously, she stepped onto the bridge and edged her way along, facing forward, holding tightly to the support ropes.
Do not look down. The bridge began to sway beneath his feet.
'God, he's giving in,' Sinclair cried.
'Your hand, quick!' Gresnick reached desperately toward Lucy.
She tried to take his hand, but as she was reaching, one side of the bridge completely collapsed.
Screaming, she thought she was knocked into empty space. It took her a moment to realize she was hanging, not falling: Gresnick had caught her.
'Wait a minute, Lucy. I can transport you upstairs. '
She closed her eyes and began to pray. From the depths.
When she opened her eyes again, she was lying on her back, with Gresnick crouched over her. 'Are you well? "
She weakly waved her hand in the air then rolled onto her stomach. She looked across the abyss where James was staring at her, his face like white sheet metal.
'In God's name, are you okay?' Sinclair asked.
"I am fine." Lucy's voice barely rose above a whisper.
"I knew I was crazy to use this bridge." Gresnick looked at James. Shining the flashlight on the frayed strings, he looked hard.
‘What is this?’ asked Sinclair.
“I think those strings were tampered with.” Gresnick looked at James. “You son of a bitch.”
"Don't be ridiculous," Sinclair said. "James was the next one to cross."
'But you held back, didn't you? He knew exactly how dangerous it was. 'Lucy, you can't believe I've ever harmed you. " James turned to
Sinclair. "It's an old bridge...it's...." He sounded frantic.
Lucy wondered why Gresnick would make such a terrible accusation. James was obviously telling the truth. "It was an accident," she said.
Gresnick turned away.
‘What are we going to do now?’ asked Sinclair.
'We'll find another way.' James looked at Lucy. “We'll meet you at the top of Jacob's Ladder. Do you remember?”
"I remember".
"Jacob is what?" Gresnick growled.
"It's a long flight of steps leading down into the gorge," Lucy explained. "James and I went there a few years ago.
“Just keep following the trail,” James said. "Now is not the time. There is another bridge a kilometer across the track on this side. We will find it as soon as we can."

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"That was a close call back there. Sinclair and James were struggling over patches of black ice, making the rough trail even more treacherous.
James nodded. He was trying to appear calm, but inside he was a wreck.
When Lucy hung over the ravine for those couple of seconds, he was both wanting her to fall and praying that she wouldn't.
When he caught her looking at him later, with the shock in her eyes, he felt stomach-churning guilt, yet it infuriated him that Gresnick was playing the hero. The American had declared his desire to be Lucy's killer. Now, it seems, he was not only willing to do anything to save her life, he wanted to take her as his lover. The Lucy Effect - everyone succumbed to it in the end. The devil's daughter.

'Strange, the bridge should collapse like that,' Sinclair commented.
James was glad it was too dark for the cardinal to see him clearly. His eyes would betray him, he was sure. Sinclair was the Vatican Enforcer, the head of the organization once called the Inquisition. He was sure to see your sins, lit up in neon.
That was the purpose of the Inquisition, after all. To force their secrets from you one by one. Nothing hidden, the truth dragged out, ready or not. He had to change the subject, remove the cardinal to think about something else.
'Cardinal, I have heard people who claim that the Templars discovered something in Jerusalem - irrefutable proof that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and had a son - and that they used this proof to blackmail the Catholic Church and extort money to ensure their silence .

Sinclair laughed. "It's amazing how much credit is given to the craziest of theories.
"What is the truth?"
"Truth is far stranger than any fiction, and nothing is stranger than the story of how the Knights Templar were formed. In 1118, Hugh de Payens and eight other French nobles turned to Jerusalem. King Baldwin I greeted warmly and surprisingly allowed them to set up their HQ in a prime location on the Temple Mount. Nine years ago, the Knights did not hire a person to fight against the Muslims. In fact, they never left their HQ.

There is virtually no evidence of what they actually did during those years.
Everything was shrouded in mystery, but it appears he spent the entire time digging the foundations of Solomon's Temple that was directly beneath his HQ. There have always been rumors that Solomon built secret passages, in which he hid his great treasure.

"It was clear that these knights were more interested in archeology and treasure hunting than in protecting any pilgrims. What were they digging for, that is the question. Something they knew was buried in Solomon's secret passages? The Ark of Alliance, perhaps? Remember that the sole purpose of the Temple was to house the Ark. The Ark has disappeared from history

more than two thousand five hundred years ago, and no firm trace of it has ever been discovered, although rumors abound.
"What did they find? James asked. "I mean, the Templars were famous for their wealth. Did they find Solomon's treasure?
Again, Sinclair laughed. "The wealth of the Templars is no mystery. Each recruit had to donate all of their possessions to the Order, and many of these recruits were very rich. Nobles of

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All of Europe made large
donations of money, goods and land. Don't forget, the Templars were the celebrities of Christendom - the poster children to use modern jargon - famous for
never backing down and always fighting to the last man. They attracted all the customers, all the sponsors, all the money. Furthermore, they were international financiers, the inventors of the modern banking system.
"Far from threatening to expose shocking revelations about Jesus to the Pope and having bought his silence in return, the Templars did
not breathe a single word of what they discovered in Jerusalem. They acknowledged that they looked for the ark but maintained that they found nothing.
"They were lying, of course, as the Inquisition eventually discovered. They confessed that what they were really looking for was a set of ancient Gnostic scrolls.
These promoted the Johannite heresy that John the
Baptist and Jesus were not the true Messiah. It was found that the original nine Templars were all related to Cathar families and it appears that they were sent on a mission by Cathars to recover lost documents that shed light on several Cathar mysteries.

"Are you saying you made no attempt to blackmail the Pope?"
'Of course. The idea that they found evidence of Jesus' alleged marriage to Mary Magdalene is laughable. What would constitute proof? A dusty document? The Vatican is full of dusty manuscripts seized from heretics proposing every weird and wonderful heresy conceivable. A painting of Jesus kissing Mary? Anyone can paint. Bones? So what? The world is full of them. Nothing could prove that Jesus was married. Even if it were written in all capital letters, in bold red ink in a document called The Gospel of Jesus, it would still not be credible.

Heretics have always falsified evidence to spread their lies.
"If nine knights arrived in front of the Pope to claim Jesus was a married man with a child, they would not have left the Vatican laden with the treasure to buy their silence...they would not have left the Vatican at all. They would have gone straight to the game.

"Furthermore, if they had anything remotely resembling proof of these wild claims, don't you think they would have had them published as soon as the Vatican ordered his arrest? At that point, there would have been no possible reason to hold back.
However, not a trace of evidence appeared, conclusively demonstrating
that they had none in the first place.
'No, the Templars' game was to pretend to be the most faithful and loyal Catholics of all, whilst secretly spreading their vile heresy. Far from stating

that Jesus was married, which would have been the first to denounce such an
idea, therefore apparently proving how orthodox they were. But the Catholic Church is ever vigilant, and eventually penetrated their secret world and exposed their heretical beliefs, virtually indistinguishable from those of the Cathars.
"But didn't I read somewhere that the Church actually absolved the Templars of heresy?" James asked.
Sinclair smiled wryly. "The Church was infested with friends and allies of the Templars.
His corruption was everywhere, even at the highest levels
of the Vatican. But the Pope saw, through the pro-Templar propaganda and what became

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false verdict and rightly condemned them.

James felt an uncomfortable affinity with the Templars. He knew exactly what it was like to lead a double life. When you hide secrets, they start to burn through your soul. Sooner or later, they would melt all the way down and come out into the open, where the whole world would see.

72

Ucy, straining to see in the dark, looked down the slope. Her parents brought her here to Cheddar Gorge when she was ten years old and her father said he would buy her ice cream if she could reach the top of Jacob's Ladder in less than fifteen minutes. Although she has placed a couple of times, she has done it in less than twelve years and has a delicious Glory Knickerbocker as her reward.

She had always thought running the 274 narrow steps of Jacob's Ladder was a great achievement: it was a feat certainly beyond her now. Even going down the stairs looked strenuous.

Up here, on a clear day, tourists have fantastic views over the Mendip Hills and the 300-hectare Nature Reserve on the clifftops. The view was even better from the wooden watchtower. On a summer day, you could glimpse the peregrine falcons that nestled on the high cliffs. She wondered if any were still

here, or whether they fled like the people.

It was also possible to see Glastonbury Tor in the distance. In a strange way, his life has always revolved around Glastonbury. His mother was always willing to tell him about the great myths and legends of Glastonbury. For a child, it looked wonderful. It was then that she developed a lifelong interest in esotericism.

On the summer day when the family came here, they sat on the grass and had a picnic in a basket. Lucy's mother told her the tale of the original Jacob's Ladder. Jacob, the patriarch whose twelve sons became the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel, was camping in the open air as he made a long journey. He rested his head on a rock and tried to get some sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending.

Lucy longed to see the angels. As for Jacob, she disliked him when she discovered that he bought her brother Esau's birthright for 'a dish of lentils. "To her son's mind, she found it strange that the messy porridge featured in the Bible. Furthermore, it seemed distasteful to steal his brother's birthright. Worse still, he impersonated his brother to obtain the necessary blessing from his father blind man. It was the act of a spy who would do anything to achieve his goals: a fraud, a liar, a man without a shred of morality. The name Jacob itself means deceiver.

"The Gnostics hated Jacob:" Gresnick commented.

Lucy looked at him for a moment. They had barely spoken since the incident on the bridge. She couldn't believe how vile he was to accuse James. Now, she was happy to get back to some kind of normal conversation.

'I did not know that. "But it was no surprise. She wasn't a fan of Jacob either.

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"Israel was named after Jacob. 'What do you mean?'
"Don't you remember the biblical story about Jacob and the angel?"
"Of course. Jacob fought with the angel all night. Nor could he gain any advantage.
"That's right, but what happened next?" Lucy shrugged.
"To fight so well, the angel gave Jacob the name Israel, which means one who fights with God. Ironic, no? I mean, how come the children of Israel, the chosen people, are the ones who fight with God?

'Gnostics arrived at what for them was an obvious conclusion. The Israelites are the chosen people of the false God and it is the true God who is fighting. The very name
of your nation proclaims the truth. 'How did the Gnostics interpret the story of Jacob's Ladder?

"They thought that the descending angels were souls being drawn to Earth by Satan. The ascending angels, on the other hand, were souls who had achieved Gnosis and could finally return to heaven.

"According to Jacob, he had his famous dream in a place called Bethel. The stone that rested his head on was known as the Stone of Bethel. Legend has it that the Bethel Stone eventually found its way to Ireland and then to Scotland, where it became known as the Stone of Destiny. The Kings of the
Scots were crowned upon this sacred stone. The English King Edward seized it during the war with the Scots and took it to Westminster Abbey, where it was then used in coronation
ceremony of English monarchs. But Scots believed that Edward was given a false one and the real stone never left Scottish soil. The prophecy said that if the true Stone of Destiny should never leave Scotland, the world would end. 'It's bizarre to hear Ireland and Scotland being mentioned in all
this.' Not true. For one thing, the Scoti, the people who gave their name to Scotland, were actually an Irish tribe. Apparently, it was
common for ancient

Egyptians and Israelites who found themselves in difficulty in their countries fled to Ireland. It was a welcoming country, far from the reach of its enemies. And from Ireland it's just a short way to Scotland.

'The Scoti were supposedly named after the daughter of a pharaoh named Scota, who left Egypt at the time of the Jewish Exodus.
"Where did you hear that story?
"It's in an ancient manuscript called the Scotichronicon. I heard that the reason little was known about Jesus between his teenage years and the ministry of the last three
years was that he wasn't in the Holy Land at all. He was somewhere in the British Isles - Glastonbury, perhaps, or Tara, in Ireland. In Dunvegan Bay, on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, there is a small island called Eilean Isa, meaning Jesus Island, where Jesus was said to have stayed for a while. The Outer Hebrides, Scotland, has many local traditions claiming that Jesus, his mother and his uncle all spent time there.

'It doesn't end there. My grandfather found Gnostic documents claiming that many of the survivors of Atlantis made their way to Scotland, and that Scotland became ground zero for Gnosticism, the epicenter from which Gnostic beliefs radiated across the world."

Lucy smiled. The Scots she met in her life didn't strike her as the great

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race, lost from Atlantis. They seemed too excited about the water of life.
'You have a charming smile,' Gresnick said.
'What?'
'You have no idea how beautiful you are, do you?' Lucy felt the blood rushing to her face. 'Don't say that to me.'
'Why not? And truth. I can't help you. ""
But... James.
"Stop it. James is a married man with a son. 'Is James married?"

here they are. Gresnick pointed his torch at Sinclair and James as they came walking along the track to the watchtower.
"Give me the torch." Lucy grabbed it Gresnick, and led the way down the steep steps of Jacob's Ladder.
Married! She kept saying the word, until she almost didn't recognize it anymore. she was with James, he never lied to her. How could a man deny his own wife and child? But there was another emotion - jealousy. She should have been James' wife. Only now did she realize how lonely she was. In her stupidity , she kicks out the only person who still meant anything to her.

As for Gresnick, what does he think he was joking about, saying those things? How could he think that she had any strong feelings for him? She liked

him and thought he was handsome, but that went as far as he went. It would take the rest of his life to put an end to James. "It's six o'clock," Gresnick said. "Do you know what that means."
Six hours, Lucy thought, before April 30, 2012 - the most fateful day in human history. Could all a life's mistakes be repaired in six hours?
Were people from all over the world praying, screwing, shouting? Does it matter?
She thought crying was the right answer. Six billion sets of tears in humanity's last midnight.

No one spoke when they reached the bottom of the stairs and set foot in Grand Cheddar Gorge. They made their way along the base of the limestone cliffs toward the main cave entrance that nature had carefully carved into the rock.

There were no lights, other than Lucy's torchbeam. The world was lowering the final curtain and turning off the stage lights. There would be nothing left, but no effect. Does anyone have the right answers to what life was all about? Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus? The Gnostics? Or anywhere else in the rest of the voices are ranting proclaiming the absolute truth without a shred of evidence. At midnight, someone might be tried, or maybe no one would. In a way, she thought it was the fair outcome. Humanity wrong to the end, still lying to himself as he walked off the stage he had disgraced for so long. No curtain call needed.

The Cheddar Gorge ticket office was abandoned, all doors open. Cheap souvenirs—guides, crystals, gems, pearls, miniature models of the Gorge—were scattered everywhere.

Lucy looked for a control panel and pressed a button. Lights came on. "Well, the

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Generator still works,' Gresnick said, taking the torch back from
Lucy.
They made their way to the cave entrance and prepared to go inside. "Is this wise?
Sinclair asked. "We could get trapped inside. If the entrance is blocked, there is no
escape route. "
"The third of the Hallows Grail is inside," said Lucy. 'I'll come in' Sinclair put his hand on his shoulder. 'But we don't have another Hallows. What's the point in
continuing this? '
'I have to do it.'
The opening in front of Lucy looked like a hole in the earth - the Hellmouth - but she walked forward, the others running after her.
When she found herself in the dreary, gray entrance
chamber, she remembered how disappointed she was as a child to see nothing but ordinary cave walls. You will see stalactites and stalagmites, her parents had promised her. She had seen these mysterious things in books and she was expecting to be immediately greeted by a series of wonders. Fortunately, they were right around the corner.

She felt as if she were walking in her own footsteps from twenty years before, her present self haunting her former self, or the other way around. It always scared him to retrace the steps of his past, ghosts colliding in the dark.
They passed a railed-off pit where a 9,000-year-old skeleton was found in 1903, belonging to a man who had been ritually sacrificed and buried. The fissure going deep into the earth filled with dark water. As a child, Lucy was convinced of a monster hiding in that water. It seemed more likely than ever. To the right was a set of musical stalactites called 'Ring Bells' that made chiming sounds if struck with the stick. They enchanted Lucy on their last visit, but now
she barely looked at them.
She led the group up a flight of stairs, then through a narrow tunnel.
When they reached the end, a white stalagmite cascade known as the Frozen Waterfall confronted them. From there they emerged into a chamber called St Paul's because it reminded the man
who discovered it of St Paul's Cathedral in London. Breathtaking when Lucy first saw it, it was no less impressive second time around.

Iridescent stalagmites, shining under the artificial light, covered one wall. Then came a feature called Aladdin's Cave, like something from a fairyland, with
its stalactites enchantingly reflected in an artificial pool. It was the kind of good cave that, as a child, Lucy wanted to take back to her house so that she could crawl into it every night and absorb its magic.
She twisted and saw that the men were all gawking at the lenses inside the chamber. But she had no sense that the third of the Grail
Hallows - the enigmatic dish - was next.
The dish had an uncertain status. For some experts, the gold, precious stone-encrusted plate in which John the Baptist was paraded in front of Herod
was the true Holy Grail. Chrétien de Troyes, the first man to mention the Grail, unequivocally described it as being held by a beautiful woman using both hands. Grail, the precise words Troyes used, was an old

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French word for dish. How could a plate be confused with a chalice? 'It's in the next chamber,' Lucy announced, her words echoing as if she had played with the voice of another place. 'The chamber is called King Solomon's Temple. I think it's the right place to find a sacred object.
She led the group along a short passage into the chamber. They passed another fabulous stalagmite cascade, and
encountered three more striking formations known as one of the Temple pillars, the archangel's wing and the organ pipes.
They came across a second frozen waterfall, much larger than the previous one, this one known as Niagara Falls. Nearby was a feature called the frozen river. Lucy stopped. His fingers tingled, just like they did at Tintagel and Cadbury.

She remembered Nostradamus's cryptic words over this mural panel by Raphael:
Bring me the head on a plate. The wrath of God. The disk

way to heaven. You must go underground to find the truth. Under freezing water.

Those last words: under the water that freezes.
No mystery now. She passed through a guardrail and climbed onto the Frozen River, standing several feet above ground level. It was incredibly slippery and
she was glad her army boots gave her a good grip.
"Be careful," said Sinclair.
For a moment, the sound of the cardinal's voice startled Lucy. Why was he the only one to speak, and not James or Gresnick?
She made her way along the strange white, solid river, keeping her arms in front of her in case she had to grab onto something to stop herself from falling. Everything was covered with a thin film of water, under the sparkling electric lights. When she reached a miniature waterfall
at the back of the river, she stopped. His entire body was electrified. Imagined that if the lights were turned off, it glows like a spectrum. Was this what she became? - A supernatural presence, an
anti-person. She haunted people, made them miserable.

Crouching down, she placed her hand in a space behind the frozen waterfall. Her fingers stretched out, feeling, and soon she touched cold metal.
At the same moment, a carousel of images spun in his mind. So much pain. Blood. A big bow of red. Pain. Darkness. Death. Calling her from time to time.
She pulled out a spectacular, shining gold plate, studded with rubies and emeralds: a dish fit to serve a king. John the Baptist's severed head, she had no doubt, as it lay upon it, his hair matted with sweat and blood, his eyes still open, crusted from his last tears.
He was presented to Herodias, Herod's wife, as the most wicked of gifts, after Salome's deadly dances.

Lucy felt another use of the plate, something dark and strange. It was from this same dish that Jesus served bread to his disciples at the
Last Supper. Why this dish? How did Jesus get hold of it in the first place? Joseph of Arimathea bought it from Herod, didn't he? The
whole thing was a conspiracy against John the Baptist and his followers. This was certainly what the

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Joanites believed. The dish, which they considered, was proof: the mockery of John's death, a sign of the conspirators' triumph. But it didn't save Jesus in the end.
The Johannites fought back and avenged their leader.
Lucy found Sinclair standing behind her. 'Did I talk to you? " he asked. 'What?'
'The past comes to you, doesn't it? Story whispers to you. You are so privileged.

There was something strange about Sinclair's tone. Furthermore, the way his eyes sparkled when he looked at the plate...

'I'll take this off your hands, if you want.' Sinclair gestured toward the plate.

Lucy shook her head. 'No, I'll hang on it.
She and Sinclair retraced their steps and joined the others. James and Gresnick were right where she had left them, their expressions strangely vacant.

'And now?' Gresnick asked.
Lucy didn't know what to say. It wasn't just a Grail Hallow left - the Holy Grail itself. Or rather, the object Robert de Boron said was the Grail. Lucy had no idea where to find him. Rafael's panel showed a castle on a wooded mountain overlooking a lake. There was no such place near here.

"Well, first, let's get out of here," Sinclair said.
Lucy looked at James. There was such a sad look in his eyes. 'What do you think, James?

"This is your show."
My show? That was the last thing this was. She was the puppet, unable to see the strings.

She headed towards the path back to the entrance. They entered a large passage, with boulders piled up on one side. He remembered from his childhood that this chamber contained a strange cave shaped like a black cat.
She found it scary back then. He had lost none of his frightening aura.
Walking quickly, she led the group through a long flight of steps that broke out into a much larger passage not far from where they came in. 'Stop!' Gresnick whistled.

Lucy looked at him curiously. He put his finger in his mouth. He concentrated hard, trying to understand what had made him so agitated. Then she heard it: a more typical engine.

'Morson found us,' Gresnick said.

The lights went out. Lucy shook her head in dismay. Was it intended to end this way?

'What are they doing?' Sinclair whispered as Gresnick turned on the torch. There were no sounds of footsteps, no signs of pursuit. 'Are they just going to wait outside?' "

"There is no other way," said Lucy. "There are lower levels for these chambers. They do not

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They were open to the public because they regularly flood, but they
exit further up the gorge. They can be reasonable. ""We don't have a choice," Gresnick said. 'Let's move.

Lucy took Gresnick's torch and swept it around the passage. Do Not Enter behind a secluded area showed entry from lower levels.

"We are not cave explorers," said James. "We might get stuck. "It's that or Morson," Sinclair
said. "I'm willing to take the risk."
"We're wasting time." Lucy marched forward, pushing the safety rope aside.

Ducking under several low arches, she entered a huge cave. As she made her way further, she heard strange, quarreling sounds and bizarre echoes. She swept round the torch but
showed nothing but damp cave walls. Green slime oozed out in some places.

Taking a few more steps, she found her steps increasingly difficult. The cave floor was covered with some kind of glue.
'What is this?' Gresnick complained. 'It's
shit,' James said. 'There's a colony of bats here.
Lucy aimed her torch at the ceiling of the cave, then almost dropped it. A mass of bats hung there, writhing.

"Jesus Christ, they're everywhere," Gresnick gasped. “There must be thousands of them.

Lucy stood there, paralyzed. He imagined them descending all at once, one heading straight into the dense suffocation cloud. They were probably vampire bats. They suck
every drop of blood out of her.
“We have to keep going,” Sinclair said. "They're not doing anything. Our luck could hold.

Lucy wasn't sure she could take another step. She turned off the torch for fear of attracting bats.
Darkness enveloped her. All he could think about was bats, the terrifying sound they would make if they attacked. Just a matter of time. She was aware of something else - a sense of
unspeakable dread. It was there in Tintagel, there at Cadbury, and now it has arrived here. Something evil was following - darkness, darkness itself.

'Can't you feel it? ", She asked.
'Move', Gresnick lative.
"I feel it," James said. "He found us.
'What are you talking?' Gresnick growled. "There is no time".
Lucy managed to struggle forward, but now she heard new sounds - writhing,
running, as if the walls and floor were coming to life.
In a panic, she turned on the flashlight again. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of spiders, beetles, centipedes, ants, and small black snakes carpeted the cave floor,
swarming around his feet.
Unable to control herself, she vomited onto the creatures closest to her feet. She felt as if her insides were dissolving.
Gresnick grabbed her arm and dragged her away. They moved as fast as they could, into another low arch and into a new cave. Then they stopped. The new

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The cave was glowing yellowish green: the floor, the walls, the ceiling, everything.

"Fireflies," James said. "Adults and larvae."
Firefly larvae, Lucy knew, were called fireflies. In ancient China, they used to collect fireflies and fireflies and place them in transparent containers to make primitive lanterns. She always wanted to see them. Not anymore. They were terrible, like the little lights from hell. 'Luciferin,' James said.
'What?'
"It's a light-emitting chemical. That's how these things glow.
Luciferina - the light of Lucifer. The luminescence of hell. That's what it was. That is why the sea at Tintagel shone, and why this cave was bright.
Every dark creature glowed when its master was near.
Fear flooded every cell in Lucy's body. The cave's yellow-green luminescence was slowly changing to aquamarine, and she knew it wouldn't be long until it was pure blue: somehow, the world was conspiring to become her worst nightmare. His forehead was saturated with sweat.
She had a fever coming on, with hot and cold chills running up and down her body.

"We're lost, aren't we?" Gresnick said.
Lucy shook her head. "I promise you, there is a way out. I remember now what the guide told us when I came here as a kid. He said there was a passage behind one of the waterfalls. It was where the men who found the caves first broke in. '

"So, shall we go back?"
She nodded, embarrassed by her mistake.
'There are field pools here," said James. "Can't you smell it?" So what?"
'If there's a spark, the whole place goes up.'
"Come on, let's get out," Gresnick shouted. Before he could move, the cave erupted. 'God preserve us,' Sinclair cried.
All the fireflies had become airborne. They were joined by a huge, buzzing, swarming mass of wasps, bees and hornets. Then the bats gathered from the adjacent cave, filling the entire chamber with their flapping wings and high-pitched squeaks. On the ground, all the insects reappeared, and there were rats too, thousands.

Lucy screamed and pressed her hands against her ears to silence the noise. The gates of hell were opened and creatures from hell were swirling and running around her like

a whirlwind, but nothing touched her, not one thing.
As her torch futilely picked out individual creatures from the growing mass, she noticed that the front of their uniform, around the crotch, was red.
Jesus God. Bleeding? Your period? But it wasn't the right time of the month. It was as if his insides were gushing out, his body trying to invert itself. She fell to her knees, trying to scream but unable to find any sound.
Mutilated. Cut. He thought of the Fisher King, incurably injured, pricked in the genitals by a black magician. The entire lower half of your

uniform was red now. Blood was spreading everywhere. She hit herself in horror and then her hands became bloodstained as well.

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Is this how it ends? Surrounded by your worst fears, every nightmare will come true.
Bats were swooping around Lucy's head, rats crawling on boots.
All the safety barriers in his mind were crumbling. There was nothing except the blue that always haunted. The last circle of hell - the purest blue.
Flames leaped upwards. The creatures began to scream hysterically.
Was this how she died? Trapped in a vision of hell. Apocalypse now. Just like Rafael's predicted mural.
Amidst the confusion - the chaos of wings, teeth, eyes, screaming, a whirlwind of movement, a bright, vibrating whirlpool trying to suck her into a seething pit of life and death - she heard a particular, strong voice: Gresnick is.

I set the field on fire. We have to leave now, Lucy... Jesus, you're hurt.
Injured? Lucy shook her head. Physical explanations. The straight lines. Cause and effect. Things that made sense. But now, here in the shadows, logic had lost its power. Only irrationality existed here.
She felt the pressure against her arms, strangely comforting. She was being dominated, supported - Gresnick on one side, James on the other. Its two knights. They would get her to safety somehow, she was sure. The smoke and flames would kill any other creature in the caves.
They managed to retrace their steps. Lucy's head kept lolling back, and every few seconds she let out a whimpering moan. If she had been stabbed in the stomach?
She panicked when she realized she had lost the plate, but later she saw it in Sinclair's hands. He must have gotten it from her in the confusion.
Within minutes, they were back at the frozen waterfall.
Lucy's lungs were choked with smoke, preventing her from speaking. She pointed frantically at a small opening in the solid rock. Gresnick entered first.
'There is a narrow passage. I can see an old door. I think Lucy's right - We might be able to get out 'The door was controlled by a rusty wheel mechanism..
Gresnick grabbed it with both hands and managed to transform it. "It's moving," he said. "We're going to do it."
Lucy felt a strange joy, as if she were in control of her destiny, for the first time since leaving the convent. Still here. Still fighting. She took the plate back from Sinclair.

They all squeezed through the door and went out into the outside world. The main road was in front of them and cliffs behind them. Before they had a chance to get their heads straight, they heard an explosion. The sky turned pink.

'Flare,' Gresnick these.

From left and right, shapes appeared – soldiers, pointing their assault rifles. Morson was in the center of the group, with a pistol. 'Give me the plate. " He waved at Lucy with his free hand.
She didn't move.
“Did you have an accident?” he asked. He walked over and took her plate. "Well, your journey is almost ready. In a few hours, everything will be over. Now we are taking you to one of our most special places: Carbonek.
"What's?" Gresnick asked. "The Holy Grail," Lucy said.

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Orson kept checking his watch. He had made Lucy sit initially with him in the driver's cab, promising not to let her out of his sight again. He said they were heading to a private property situated in a valley near Glastonbury.

Lucy doesn't take her eyes off the road. More snow was falling. The world was trying to hide its flaws, she thought. There was a constant pressure in his abdomen, as if his insides wanted to dribble out. She didn't dare look down, afraid to see how much blood was staining the lower half of her uniform. Looking in the rearview mirror, she caught a glimpse of herself. Some creature looked back, like a murderer, its face stained with blood, hair dirty and scattered, its eyes sunken.

Better to close your eyes, to try to avoid seeing what was coming. Images flooded his mind. She was in a forest, where every tree was made of mirrors, and the grass was made of mirror filaments.
Running through the forest mirrored in her blood-stained uniform, Lucy knew she was being chased by something. Team? Love? Hatred? His face was reflected back from mirrored drops from the trees as a wind blew mirror world.
Everywhere she was confronted by her reflection, vibrating with the earth. A million mirrored butterflies with your image trapped in their wings.
She tried to run faster, away from her life. Instead, she saw her past flashing up in the mirror trees, her personal history transformed into reflections hanging from branches, swaying in the wind.
I have to overcome reflexes to escape the forest. But when she emerged from the trees, she ran into a mirrored lake. She was in the center of the shiny surface. Your life in a mirror. An inverted life. And then cracked. She fell in, taking a cascade of mirror shards with her.
His eyes opened.

The two military trucks stopped in the outer courtyard of the stone castle on the crest of a steep valley. Carbonek. It was one of the names given to the Grail Castle of legend.
'Get out,' Morson ordered.

Lucy climbed out, feeling dizzy. When she looked up at the sky, she was amazed at the spectacle. Thousands of shooting stars of all colors were wrapping themselves in front of southwest England. Her legs shook beneath her as she took a few steps across the snow-covered cobblestones.

'This is a recreation of Montségur at the time it fell to the Catholic Crusaders,' Morson said.

Lucy never knew this place existed, despite it being so close to Glastonbury. It must be a famous tourist spot, but she hadn't found a single reference to it. This meant that the owners controlled all the land around here, all the roads, which could stop newspapers and television channels from reporting on it. These must be people of immense wealth and power. The Puppetmasters walk in the shadows.

She squirmed all over, looking at James. He was with Sinclair, head down.

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It would soon be April 30, 67 years to the day since Adolf Hitler committed suicide in his bunker. People thought he chose that day to kill anyway because
the Soviets were within a few hundred meters of his bunker and could make a final breakthrough at any moment. Now, Lucy knew, April 30 was the Gnostics' most special day, the day they believed that the Rule of Jehovah, the Demiurge, would end once and for all. Hitler had thought that day would come during his lifetime, that he would instigate the final act.

Instead, he ended his own world on April 30th. Was the outcome Hitler desired about to come true now? It was still impossible to imagine that the heartbeat of the world was time to be satiated.

"Everyone in," Morson latiu.
Lucy joined the others as they marched across the castle's drawbridge and into a second courtyard, this time inside the castle walls. At the rear it was a tall, rectangular keep, lit by blue spotlights. A ghost castle.
In the center of the inner courtyard was a black wooden tower with many ledges, each packed with ravens. Lucy shivered as she looked at the black birds. Each
of them looked at her, following her as she moved.
Morson opened an iron door and gestured with his pistol for everyone to go inside the castle. They entered an entrance area, covered with familiar banners: the Square and Compasses of the Freemasons, the Rising Sun of the Gnostics, the Bird of the Soul of the Alchemists, the black-on-white flag of the Templars, the PATTEE Cross of the Templars, the 'Skull, the Cathar Templar blue swastika on a white background, the Nazi swastika and the SS lightning runes. Finally, the biggest flag of all - two matching serpents - the mark of Cain.

Lucy thought it was grotesque. It was so difficult to accept that all these groups were just different aspects of a single ancient religion whose sole purpose was to destroy Jehovah's world. No one had ever imagined such a link, but everything piled up. All of these groups prominently feature well-known conspiracy theories.

Perhaps the truth was that there was only ever one conspiracy, stretching throughout history since the dawn of humanity.
Morson opened a second door at the far end of the entry room and led them into a large room with a large fireplace, crackling with burning wood.
The round table took pride of place in the middle of the room, with a Nazi swastika painted in its center. Lucy was horrified. That symbol had always made her sick: the crematorium flag. Yet there it was, being paraded as a kind of symbol of chivalry, the
emblem of King Arthur's valiant court. How could the chivalry of the brilliant Knights of the Round Table be linked to the horrors of Birkenau? It simply couldn't be true.

MORSON's soldiers took position across the hall, leaving Lucy with Gresnick, James, Sinclair, and Morson. One of the soldiers went to the black velvet
curtains covering one of the walls. When he pulled back, Lucy sighed.

In front of her was a perfect reproduction of Rafael's mural. To the left of the mural was the bald eagle that appeared on the front of the
Great Seal of the United States of America and the back of the dollar. On the right were the pyramid and the eye shown on the back of the Great Seal. Above the mural were the words of the

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America's official motto, In God We Trust,
and below, Novus Ordo Seclorum - New Order of the Ages.
Sergeant Morson looked at Lucy. “Now, do you understand?” he said. "Everything the world believes is separate is in fact connected. Who would have thought that a
direct link existed between the Nazis and the founders of the United States of
America, that America is the promised land of the descendants of Cain, that the American people
are the new Templars, the new Cathars, the people in whom the
power of alchemy has reached its highest point. It is no coincidence that it fell to
America's most elite soldiers - Delta Force - to carry this mission to its conclusion. The longest, most complex mission in history has always been ours to finish.

Out of the corner of her eye, Lucy noticed Cardinal Sinclair step forward. Morson spun.
"Who told you to move, holy fool?
For some reason, Sinclair seemed much more upright than before, taller. He extended his right hand, and the light shone a gold ring on his index finger.

Lucy's mouth dropped open. His father's ring.
Morson was paralyzed. Like an automaton, he knelt, bowing his head. He took Sinclair's outstretched hand and kissed the ring.
"I had no idea, Grand Master," he said. Lucy sighed.
'Who else could it be?' Sinclair replied. 'What greater irony could there be than that the head of the Holy Inquisition was the heretical bow? - In the middle of the enemy's fortress, whispering in his
leader's ear. The last place anyone would look for the supreme heretic was at the top of the department accused of heresy hunting.

“Of course. It seems so obvious now.
'Now I'll call the others.' Sinclair walked out and it was obvious that this castle was a place he knew very well. It was his home.
Lucy couldn't help herself and stepped forward to study the copy of Rafael's
Mural. Even now, he swayed to see her own painting featured there in one of the art world's greatest works, created by her in a past life. If soul lines truly existed, it meant we were all inextricably linked to the past. The memories of our previous lives have been buried within us, which is part of our unconscious that surfaces from time to time, incomprehensible and terrible. We were haunted by ourselves, by what we had done in our past lives, by what others had done to us. One life, this life, was troublesome enough. To add hundreds of other lives was to multiply the misery. It was a recipe for building hell inside our heads.

She looked at each of the panels, following it round as they told their strange story, similar and yet different to the traditional Christian story of the world. Only the most brilliantly
conceived representation of heresy could be smuggled under the Vatican's nose. He remembered the story of Hieronymus Bosch. Some said the Dutch painter was a high priest of heresy, but the ultra-Orthodox Spanish King Philip II loved his paintings. We see what we want, don't we? Only those who know the code can read it.

Lucy heard a strange creaking and twisting sound round. Thirteen knights entered the room wearing black cloaks emblazoned with the scarlet Templar

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pass through. Over each of their hearts was a silver skull and crossbones. The men had a frightening aura, as if they
had taken the brutality of the medieval world with them. Even Morson looked uncomfortable. One of the knights carried a black box.

As Lucy retreated, the thirteen knights took position in a straight line in front of Rafael's mural. The one in the center took it a step further - Sinclair.
'We are the Invisible College,' he said, 'the organ of the Illuminati.
We are the Bright Beings, the Saint of light. In the past, a group known as the College controlled the Illuminati, but a shadow leadership was established to take over from the College if they were to be killed or captured.
In the 1930s, the College became corrupt and consisted entirely of Nazi Party members. By the end of May 1945, only one was dead, including Grand Master Adolf Hitler, who had perverted the true message of Gnosticism. The sole survivor passed control to the Invisible College, who were British. In fact, we are all Scottish now, bearing some of the most illustrious names in Scottish history: Bruce, Wallace, Douglas, Randolph, Keith, Moray, MacDonald, Fleming, Burns, Stewart, Maxwell, Hume and Sinclair.

"Many of these names were present at the Battle of Bannockburn, the greatest military victory in Scottish history. It was fought on one of the most special days of Gnosticism - June 24, the feast day of St. John the Baptist.

Scots won despite being massively outnumbered and against thousands of English heavy cavalry, the medieval equivalent of tanks. "It's only fair that the Scots should be in control in the end. After all, a Scot discovered America. The Templar Ban fleet that sailed from France in 1307 was led by one of my ancestors, Admiral William Sinclair, the true discoverer of the Americas. A secret shipping route was established between the Americas and Scotland, controlled by my family. One of the main stopping points on the route was Nova Scotia - Nova Scotia. Another of my ancestors, Henry Sinclair, established a Templar base there.

"The Scots have always been at the center of world events, and Scotland's own history reflects the Gnostic struggle. When the Scottish king Robert the Bruce was hiding in a cave from his enemies, he saw a spider struggling to spin its web and learned the Gnostic lesson of having to try and try and try again. The Gnostic mission was to free humanity from hell, to restore every lost soul to the embrace of the true God. America was the son of Scotland, the superpower we created to help us fulfill our destiny.

Fifty million Americans have Scottish blood in their veins. The Declaration of Independence is based on the Declaration of Arbroath, written in 1320 asserting the independence and freedom of the Scottish people and their right to make and unmake their rulers."

He gave a signal and the knight holding the black box approached the round table, placed it on the edge of the table and opened it.
Lucy was outraged when the knight took her preserved head and placed it atop crossbones on a crimson velvet cushion.
'That is the caput mortuum,' said Sinclair, 'the dead head of the most mysterious man

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of history. These are your femurs. This is where Caveira originated.
'From who? Gresnick asked.
Sinclair smiled. 'Your grandfather's lifework was to understand The Cainite Destiny. He passed the task on to his daughter and she to
you. Well, here at Carbonek you will find all the answers.
"Contrary to what Sergeant Morson believes, we have deciphered the Voynich manuscript. The man who appears after at Yale University works for us. He made a discovery a few years ago that he kept a secret from the academic community. When he was on vacation in Carcassonne, France, an antiquarian bookseller offered him an original manuscript of Chrétien de Troyes' book Conte del Grail, the source of the first Grail story, together with an unknown second manuscript. The main manuscript was written in Old French, the second in jargon, as far as the bookseller was concerned. What he didn't know was that it was exactly the same "scribbles" that appeared in the Voynich manuscript. Our inner man was certain that the second manuscript was also the Conte del Grail, but written in the secret language of the Cathars. By comparing the two manuscripts line by line, our inner man was

able to finally decode the language of the Voynich manuscript and provide a complete translation.
Lucy looked at Gresnick. Despite everything, his eyes were shining. He was hanging on Sinclair's words.
"The Voynich manuscript says that after the disaster of Atlantis, the religion of Cain was almost destroyed. All the priests died, and the religion was extinct with the exception of a few fragmentary pages in the Book of
Cain. A few survivors reached Scotland. From there, some left they ventured back to the Middle East in an attempt to rediscover their religion.
"The man to begin the task in earnest was John the Baptist. He used baptism to symbolize the process of embracing Gnosticism. To dive into the water, he said, was to show his willingness to bathe in the sea of true knowledge. But John always claimed that a
second, greater man was following him. He made his famous statement: After me comes one who is mightier than I, and I am not worthy to stoop to untie the strap of his sandals." .

"That was about Jesus, wasn't it?" James said.
"Don't be nonsense." Sinclair's face darkened immediately. 'John the Baptist despised Jesus. He called him a liar, a deceiver, an occultist and sorcerer who led his followers astray.
One of his most famous quotes about Jesus was: He perverted the words of light and turned them into darkness and converted those who were mine and perverted all worship. On another occasion he said: I do not believe him,
because he practices witchcraft and treason. Sinclair pointed to the preserved head. "This is what John thought the Messiah
era.
'It's Simon Magus, isn't it?' Gresnick said.
"Very good, Colonel. Simon the Magician is the most overlooked figure in history, the lost prince of humanity, a man so brilliant, so experienced, so capable of extraordinary feats, that people thought he was a magician. The Simonians , the Gnostic sect that most revered him, said that it was God who came to earth, just as Christians

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said about Jesus. Irenaeus, an early leader of the Christian Church, brands Simon Magus "the father of all heretics". Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History declared Simon "the first author of heresy." He was accused of being the founder of Gnosticism.
"Some experts think that the beliefs of the Cathars and the Knights Templar can be traced back to the Gnostic Johannite sect. In fact, the Johannites were only a minor influence. The Simonians and the Cainites were the true ancestors. Both were inspired by Simon and were Based on the lost religion of Atlantis, the Simon religion reconstructed.

"The Templars were said to worship a head called Baphomet. The head right in front of you is the object itself. They did not worship it, because they would never have worshiped any material object, but they thought it brought them closer to the true God. If you apply the Atbash Cipher Baphomet cracking code, you will get the ancient Greek word Sophia meaning

wisdom. That is what Simon was - the Father of Wisdom, the man who recovered the lost knowledge of Atlantis, who restored Cain to his pre-eminent position among men.

'Simon was the reincarnation of Cain, just as Hitler was. Jesus Christ was the reincarnation of Abel, and so was Stalin. When Cain and Abel are reincarnated at the same time in history, the world is always plunged into terrible conflict.

"If things had been different in the conflict between Simon and Jesus, Simonianism would now be the official religion of much of the world, and Christianity would be a forgotten sect.
But Jesus, tragically, won.
"Many Simonians and Joanites pretended to be Christians, but they were told: When Jesus oppresses you, then say: We belong to you. But do not confess it in your hearts or deny the voice of your master, the great King of the Light, for the Messiah lies in occult and is not revealed."

"What happened to Simon Magus?" Gresnick asked.
'When John the Baptist was executed because of Jesus' conspiracy, Simon knew he would be the next target. He fled - to Scotland. Jesus then proclaimed himself the Messiah, sickeningly claiming to be the one prophesied by John the Baptist. Simon counterattacked, using two of his secret followers - Caiaphas, the high priest of the Temple, and Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. Jesus was crucified on Mount Golgotha, the site of the Skull, but his body disappeared after his death. Either he was snatched away by his followers, or Jehovah the Demiurge caused him to disappear. Whatever the case, the story caught the world's imagination and the abomination of Christianity took root. Simon, who returned to Judea after the death of Jesus, could not stop his ascension and ended up being executed by Christian assassins, with the same sword that cut off the head of John the Baptist. The severed head was displayed on the same plate that John was once placed on. The head, sword and plate were preserved as sacred relics, the only objects valued by the Gnostics. The head is there, and Lucy found the sword and plate.

"" But

that's not how Simon Magus died," Gresnick said. "He had a confrontation with Simon Peter in the Roman Forum in front of Emperor Nero. Simon Magus levitated to demonstrate his magical powers, and Simon Peter prayed to God to strike him down. Simon Magus fell and died in the

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Emperor's Feet. "
"That story was made up," Sinclair said. 'It symbolized the struggle between Christianity and Gnosticism to become the official religion of the Roman Empire.

"There's something I don't understand, said Lucy. 'How did the sword and plate end up in England?

'Caiaphas hid in the underground passages of the temple. The original nine
Knights Templar dug them up and ultimately decided England was the safest place to store them. They were hidden in places related to the Arthurian legends. Tintagel was the place where Arthur was supposedly

conceived, and the main cave in Cheddar Gorge was supposedly where King Arthur and his ghostly army lay sleeping, ready to set out to establish a new Camelot.
'But why did the Cathars and the Templars become so fascinated by the Arthurian romances? Gresnick asked. 'Why start linking biblical events with Celtic stories?'

"Some stories are archetypal. They have a pattern that repeats itself over and over again, in different times and cultures. The most archetypal story of all is the quest for the Holy
Grail. It maps almost exactly what was happening in Judea in the first century EC.

"In Lucy's book, she identified Judas as Mordred, Jesus as Arthur, John the Baptist as Merlin, the twelve apostles as the Knights of the Round Table, full of good intentions but suffering from their
human limitations. She wasn't sure about Guinevere Mary Magdalene, she speculated.

"Indeed, Jesus is Mordred and Simon Magus is Arthur. The Knights of the Round Table are Cain's original priesthood. Salome is the sorceress Morgana. Guinevere is Helen,
the lover of Simon Magus. Simon Peter, the future first pope is Lancelot. He was once Simon Magus' right-hand man before switching sides.
He and Helena had an affair.
'Camelot is the heaven of the True God. The forces that threaten to destroy it are the temptations offered by Satan to lure souls away from the light. The Agreste is the spiritual
desolation of the material world. The catastrophic relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere shows how lust can destroy the perfect kingdom, how souls are lured to their doom by sex.

Arthur hovers over Guinevere's adultery and Camelot crumbles, paralyzed by a spiritual malaise. Civil war breaks out, and the only thing that can restore Camelot is a worthy knight who can
find the Holy Grail. The Quest for the Grail is the arduous quest to restore lost purity, to return to the true God.

"We are both the Grail Castle and the holy knights who protect it. Down the centuries, we have been forced to live in the shadows to hide from our enemies, so the Grail Castle has become a mystical, elusive place. It's an epic journey to get to the Grail Castle, because to do that, you have to achieve Gnosis. That's what Galahad, Perceval and Bors all achieved, that's why they were allowed to find the Holy Grail. Out there is the Wasteland, hell ruled by Satan."

Lucy was surprised to hear Sinclair. In her mind, she was correcting all the errors in her book. At the beginning of her book, she cited

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Jung, who was fascinated by the Grail all his life: The Grail stories had been of the greatest importance to me since I read them, at the age of fifteen, for the first time. I had a feeling that a big secret was hidden behind these stories. Lucy believed she had discovered the secret. Now, she realized, she had barely begun to understand what was happening. "Was there a real King Arthur?" she asked.

"Arthur was a warchief in what is now Scotland and he fought Angles and Saxon invaders. He was victorious, and northern Britain retained its Celtic identity. Arthur went far north to the Highlands and established Camelot. It was built on a small island at the confluence of the three lakes, on the site where Eilean Donan now stands. The Isle of Avalon was the neighboring island of Skye. The battle of Camlann was fought in the Kyle of Lochalsh, the strip of Skye opposite mainland. Merlin was a Celtic druid. The whole story was appropriated by the English and moved to southwest England. The Welsh and French also have versions.

Sinclair looked at his watch. "Not much time. Now, we have to prove, once and for all, that we can trust you, Lucy.
'What do you mean?'
"Do you know how many seats are set at the Round Table? 'Thirteen. Twelve knights and King Arthur.'

"Indeed. The Round Table is the counterpart of the table of the Last Supper; thirteen seats - twelve apostles and Jesus. One of the apostles is a traitor - Judas.
In the Gnostic version, Simon Magus replaces Jesus and Jesus replaces Judas.
But a traitor's thirst remains forever.
'The Siege Perilous,' Lucy said. 'That's
right: the Siege Perilous, the dangerous seat, the seat of Judas. When the round table met, one of the knights had to remain standing, because only the purest of knights could sit on the bench of Judas. Only a knight mounted the project -.
Galahad, the purest knight of all" Sinclair pointed to his version of the Round Table. "We have our Judas seat too, or should I say Jesus seat. All the chairs are black bar which one, which is red. Anyone with impure motives who sits in that chair will die. We don't know how it works, but it does.

Any traitors, liars, who have not confessed their lies, those who play false others, will perish if they sit there. In Dante's Inferno, the smallest circles, those closest to Satan, where traitors are delivered. In the final, deepest circle, the ninth circle, are Judas, Brutus, and Cassius, the three greatest traitors of them all. Except Judas wasn't supposed to be there at all. It must be Jesus.

"Now, we will all take our turn on the bench, to prove that we are who we say we are, that our hearts are true."

Sinclair sat down in the red chair without a hitch, followed by each of his twelve companions. Morson took his turn, then each of his soldiers.
As Lucy watched, she wondered what would happen to the soldier who helped them escape from Cadbury Chapel. She could see him near the back of the line. As he got
closer, he looked more and more like an animal prey. At the last moment, he fell to the ground, clutching his stomach.
"Behold the traitor," cried Sinclair. “Force him on the bench.
The man was grabbed by three soldiers and pushed onto the bench. As soon as you let go, the

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The bench collapsed beneath the man, part of the floor opening up. The livid flame rose through the hole in the floor. After the screaming stopped, a smell of burning flesh spread round the hallway. The seat reappeared, in good condition.
'Now you,' Sinclair said to Lucy. "I'm not doing that."
"Above all, we must be sure of you. If you have always been pure of heart, nothing will harm you."

Lucy didn't move. She didn't want to go anywhere near that place.
Sinclair signaled to Morson. The sergeant pointed the pistol at Lucy. "I told you I would find out if you were a false Messiah. You know I won't hesitate to shoot you if you don't prove yourself.
"Sit down, Lucy," Gresnick insisted. 'You'll be fine. "
Beautiful? That place was one step away from hell. Lucy looked at Morson. His face was hard, his eyes unblinking. He looked exactly like Captain Kruger had at the convent. He would pull the trigger.
She sat down. Nothing happened. Anything. She got up and left. "Thank God," Sinclair said then turned to James. "Now, what about the man who says he loves you. Are you pure of heart, Mr. Vernon?
Are they worthy of Lucy's love? Or are you a traitor?
Lucy got the impression James was doing everything in his power not to look at her. He took a few steps towards the headquarters, then stopped.
"I can not do it. '
"I knew it," Gresnick shouted. "He sabotaged the rope bridge. He tried to kill you, Lucy.
James stood there with his mouth open, unable to respond.
Lucy was sick. Some things you share from your life onwards, like the unconditional love of your parents. They are the foundations of your life. Everything else can collapse around you, but not those. James joined his parents as one of his foundations. Now, they had everything collapsing.

"You disgust me," Morson turned to James, "but you're not going to die yet. We have other plans for you.
"They should force you to sit down, you bastard," Gresnick growled. He jumped at James but was dragged away.
'Enough,' Morson said. "We learned everything we needed to know."
"The true God gave us this gift for the souls of the test men, and he gave us you, Lucy," said Sinclair. "You have found three of the Grail Hallows. Now you must find the last one - the Holy Grail itself."

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ucy tried not to look at what was in front of him. She looked back down the valley, at Castle Carbonek on the ridge, a red moon sitting overhead. The valley, deep in snow, was illuminated by pale blue spotlights hidden within the woods that covered the valley.

Sinclair had brought her an ornamental stone bridge built over a circular lake at the foot of the valley, but he did not allow her to change from her blood-stained uniform. He claimed that his soul, knowing how close it was to freedom, was withdrawing from its physical prison, causing his bodily functions to go haywire. She wasn't

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convinced. She felt repulsive.
They were alone in the center of the bridge, while the others were gathered at each end. She prayed that the last of the Hallows Grail, the most famous of all, was hidden somewhere in the stone of the bridge. "Where do you want me to look?" His voice was almost inaudible.

Sinclair looked at her. "You know where, Lucy. In the blue, Lucy. In the blue." He stabbed his finger into the lake.
"Before this bridge was built, one of my predecessors ordered his men to drain the lake and do a fingertip search. They inspected every inch to find the Holy Grail. They didn't manage it. Only you can do that. You is Galahad's successor. Do you know the symbol he wore on his white cloak?

Lucy shook her head, her face burning from the cold night.
"He wore a red pattée cross like the one on my cloak. Galahad was one of us - a Templar.

“But you’re wearing black.
"We wear black because Cain's priesthood did, the same reason Hitler's SS wore black. They, like us, displayed Death's Head. Today, more than ever, that is our most sacred symbol."

'Why?'
"Because this is the eve of the Apocalypse. In a few hours, the world will die." He gave a signal and everyone around the circular lake, blue spotlights turned on, bathing in the lake in intense blue.
Lucy looked out at the lake, at the reflections on the water's surface - her terrors taking shape: blue shadows and whispers, all her blue nightmares coming true.
"You have heard the legend that Joseph of Arimathea hid the Holy Grail in a well at the foot of Glastonbury Tor. It was no legend. The Knights Templar, at the end of the twelfth century, sought the good and found the Grail. They brought it here. The Holy Grail is hidden at the bottom of the lake. You can find it for us, Lucy. Everything comes to fruition in you.

You are the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega.
"Do not say that." And truth. "
'How can it be true? I'm terrified. I can't go in the water.'
"This is the way it should be, Lucy. These are the most important hours in all of human history. Nothing great can be achieved without sacrifice. You have to overcome the toughest opponent of all – yourself."

Lucy tried desperately to think of something to say. Anything to avoid the water... the blue. Colonel Gresnick told me religious sites were all invaded

all over the world," she said, "places associated with the Hallows Grail and the Ark of the Covenant. He thought Morson was responsible but Morson denied any knowledge of it.
Sinclair smiled. "I called for the raids. 'What?'
"They were a calculated ploy. We already knew that none of the sites contained anything we were looking for, but our enemies weren't aware of it. We wanted to sow confusion, put religion at the forefront of people's minds as the cause of disasters around the world. A member of my Round Table was in command of an elite Scottish commando unit supposedly on exercises.

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training camps in the Arctic. They were the ones who carried out the attacks, not the Americans. Morson wasn't even aware of our existence until now. All he knew was that there were influential people in Britain who could help him with his mission."
'Why use Morson at all? You once had your own Special Forces unit. 'He was the captain of the Morson we were interested in'
'The captain? Why?'
"Because your task is impossible without it." "I don't understand."
"You will soon have all the answers, Lucy. Now, you must seek the Holy Grail.
Lucy remembered that Morson said something about his captain having a meaningful name. Lúcio, what was it, wasn't it? Lucy's counterpart. But what was the captain's last name? Did Morson tell her? She couldn't remember.
When she looked at the sparkling water, she began to cry. "I can not do it.
'You will do this because of the oldest of sins - love. If you don't dip the Holy Grail, we will kill James Vernon.

Morson was standing next to James, grabbing his arm. In her mind, Lucy heard Gresnick's voice: 'Let him die. He tried to kill her. They don't help these people.

Sinclair nodded to Morson and the sergeant placed the pistol at James' temple. James closed his eyes and braced himself.
Lucy turned around and saw lights reflecting off the surface of the
water. She had never seen water so blue: the color of suffering, the measure of pain. No matter what
James did, she couldn't watch him die. He was unthinkable. "Give me
a blindfold," she said.
"But you won't be able to see anything underwater." "I do not need."
Sinclair reached under his cloak and pulled out a black cloth covered with a
silver skull and crossbones. "I was intending to break the Holy Grail on this." He blindfolded Lucy then helped her to the railing of the bridge.
She stood for a moment, swaying in the breeze. The water, she knew, would be cold. She was in a heavy army uniform, and she couldn't see a

thing. This would be the hardest dive of his life. God help me, she muttered before diving into the water.

At first, she felt nothing but the numbing, enormous shock of ice-cold water. The lake was much deeper than expected and her uniform dragged her down to the lake bed. When she
touched bottom, something remarkable happened - she felt the old strength return, the experience born of a thousand dives.
Twisting round, she aimed herself at the surface. Even with the blindfold on, she could see a blue glow. She found herself within the color blue, within his core, absorbed

by him. He was in her heart, her mind, every cell. Your soul color. His body started to shake. Waves of distorted sounds bombarded her. She realized they were human voices; just whispers at first, but
quickly amplifying. Hundreds of them: men, women, children and even babies. They were talking to
her, telling her things. Voices in your head. They were back, worse than it had been in the convent. Lose it. His recovery, his healing, was all an illusion.

She struggled to breathe. I have to get back to the surface. Air. Kicking off the bed, she made her way upward through the water. She got up quickly, the water

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looking part in front of her. Reaching the surface, she took as deep a breath as she could, trying to release the burning sensations in her lungs.

‘Anything?’ Sinclair shouted.
She didn't respond, just fell and dove again. The voices were still bombarding her. She imagined hundreds of ghost swimmers, different shades of blue, all of them translucent, surrounding her. Like angels. Finally,
she understood. They were his soul line, his past lives. Everyone talking to her at the same time.

All together. She was all over again, all her pasts reunited. Everything she was, had been, or could be. Linked across time and space. Connected for all eternity. She cut through the water effortlessly, just like she did in the old days when her mother and father were still alive.

Groping among the reeds on the lake bed, she imagined her father's hands guiding her.
When she was a baby, he wrapped her in a strange
ceremony. Surrounded by men in black robes with skull and crossbones on their silver rings,
he dipped her into a river. He spoke in a language she had never heard before. Was it Aramaic? That's all why, wasn't it? All together, that was his destiny. A child of the water, born to find the
Holy Grail in the blue.

She visualized the location of the Grail. Others had looked for him and found nothing. Why? Buried in some way, or hidden. In the sand and gravel under the reeds? Concentrate harder, he thought.

His fingers touched a stone among the reeds. At the same moment, an image flashed in his mind. Had it been deliberately emptied, if it hadn't? The Grail was hidden inside that rock. Then the hole was
sealed with gravel and the stone placed in the center of a layer of reeds.

Feeling around the stone, she located the gravel in the seal and cleaned as much of it away as she could. Getting inside, she touched something regular, cold and metallic. The current surged through her, more powerful than anything she had ever experienced, shooting up every cell in her body.

The souls around him, all of their pasts, were visible. Even though she was blindfolded, she could see them clearly, as real as she was, smiling at her. And above all among them was Nostradamus. The entire lake had lit up, every water molecule glowing, a pool of eerie light. She imagined the glow stretching to the bridge, the snow-covered valley with the dark woods on either side, the castle on the ridge. Everywhere.

She kicked her way to the surface, holding the Grail. When she climbed out of the lake, everyone ran towards her.
"My God, she's got it," cried Sinclair.
She stood up and took off the blindfold. In her hand, she had a silver chalice, radiating light, making her skin translucent. She had never seen anything so beautiful. Soon, everyone
else joined Sinclair. They looked as she stood there at the edge of the lake in the snow,
in the ghostly glow of the Grail. They continued looking.

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It was impossible, but it was true: she was holding the Holy Grail.

ive it for me. Sinclair doesn't take his eyes off the Grail for a moment.
Lucy delivered, strangely relieved. The world had desperately searched for
this object for centuries. Now, she had found it, and because of it, the world could end. She
wanted nothing to do with it.
Sinclair held it and turned it around to look at it from all angles.
"Isn't that strange? So a lot of people have looked for it, believed in it, loved it.
All our problems would be solved, they thought. However, this is a false Grail, a
deliberate deception, our greatest trick.
'What do you mean?' Lucy was surprised.
Sinclair turned around and started taking everyone to Carbonek. Lucy ran after him. "But this is the Grail.

Sinclair gave a wry smile. "Since the time of the Cathars, Gnostics have believed that the
way for people to get out of the wheel of suffering is to solve the mystery
of the Grail. For us, knowledge is everything. Faith and good works count for nothing.
Life is a process intellectual. Salvation is for intelligent people, not for those who have
nothing but blind faith to offer. Those who have managed Gnosis
know exactly what the Grail question represents. 'But the Grail question is about showing
compassion to those who suffer. " said Lucy. "And nothing
else."
"You are wrong. The Grail Question is the deepest question of all. It comes in two forms.
The Grail Seeker is supposed to ask the wounded

King of the Grail, what ails you? To a Christian this sounds like an expression of simple
compassion, just as you said, but to a Gnostic it means something very different.
The Gnostic is asking if you are aware that there is something fundamentally wrong with
the world. What afflicts us all is that we are trapped souls on a prison planet.
"The second form of the question, the main version, is that Perceval did not ask for the king's
Grail after it was first displayed in the Grail Hallows
procession: Who does the Grail serve? For a Christian, the simple answer is that it serves the
Grail king. For Gnostics what does it
mean do you believe in the true God or Satan? The Grail and the Spear are Christian
symbols. The Sword and the Dish are Gnostic symbols related to John the Baptist and Simon Magus.
Christ, the son of the Creator,
is the spawn of Satan, while John and Simon are servants of the true God.
"The Grail Hallows procession, in which competing symbols are paraded side by side,
means that you are being offered the choice between
two radically different religions. At the end of the ceremony, you must make
your choice. The answer you give for the Grail Question determines your destiny. The
Gnostic answers that the Grail and the Spear serve Satan, while the Sword and the Dish
serve the true God. If you do not give the answer, or if you fail to ask the question in the first
place , you will never be admitted to the Grail Castle again.
Lucy absorbed Sinclair's words. It surprised her that one of the most sacred objects

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of the world could be so misunderstood. Far from being something you would want to find - the culmination of your spiritual journey with life - the Grail was something to be avoided. The real idea behind it when Chrétien de Troyes, Robert de Boron and Wolfram von Eschenbach first wrote about the subject all those centuries ago was that you should approach it with extreme caution, that it had a deceptive, seductive, ever-changing quality. . Ultimately the message was that you should avoid it at all costs.

Each writer deliberately called it something different - a plate, Christ's cup or a stone from heaven - so that people would feel compelled to unlock its mystery, and, hopefully, eventually find their way to the Grail Castle, the world of Gnosticism, where they can finally discover the truth.

But the three Gnostic writers failed. In their attempts to hide their true intentions from the prying eyes of the Inquisition, they added many layers of code and symbolism. The mystery was made, but impenetrable.
Even many Gnostics did not understand. It was a secret that only the elite had the key to, and even they came dangerously close to losing it.

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When they returned to Carbonek, Lucy was allowed to take a shower and change out of her dirty uniform and into a new one. Returning to the Great Hall, she discovered a ceremony in progress.

The preserved head and bones of Simon Magus had been placed on a golden table. Sinclair and his twelve knights were on their knees, arms outstretched. Morson and his soldiers were at the back of the room, while Gresnick and James stood as far away as possible. James looked sick now, like a ghost.

"We acknowledge Baphomet, the Father of Wisdom," Sinclair and his men sang. "He is our guide, our inspiration. He has shown us the way to the truth, to the kingdom of the True God.

They stood up and Lucy noticed that they had placed a large golden crucifix on the floor in front of Baphomet.

'We abuse that obscene cross,' the knights cried. 'We spit on it, trample on it, urinate on it, smear excrement on it. We renounce Jesus Christ, we denounce Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is a false prophet, the arch traitor, the offspring of Satan, rightfully killed by Baphomet's loyal servant Longinus.

On both sides of the Baphomet, a few meters away, there were two more golden tables. From one layman a spear that Lucy had not seen before, along with the newly found Holy Grail, from another were the sword and plate Lucy had recovered from Tintagel and Cheddar.

"Now, it is time for the Grail Hallows' ceremony," Sinclair announced.
Two thrones, such as those King Arthur might have sat on, were brought in and Lucy was ordered to sit on one. Sinclair took the other. The hall lights were turned off until the only illumination came from two candelabras, each containing about twenty candles.

The Grail Hallows were collected by four Sinclair knights, who carried them in procession in a circle around the preserved head, then around each throne. All four objects glowed an unearthly aquamarine color, like

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if they do not properly belong to this world, but some higher plane.
Lucy found it incredible that she was involved in this, a ceremony at least 800
years old, revealing the ancient beliefs of the Cathars and the Knights Templar. The story had come
to life.
The knight holding the spear stopped in front of Sinclair. Suddenly there was palpable tension. What the hell
was going on? The other three knights watched.
"Do it," Sinclair shouted and visibly braced himself.
The knight stepped forward and plunged his spear into Sinclair's inner thigh.
Oh God. Lucy couldn't believe what she was seeing. Blood gushed from Sinclair's leg. It
looked like one of his main arteries had been cut open.
The four knights ignored him, returned to the golden tables and placed down
the Grail Relics.
'Say the words,' Sinclair barked at Lucy.
She looked at the blood dripping onto the floor and wanted to vomit. Why did he do it? He could die in a few
minutes. Why doesn't anyone intervene?

She started to stand, intending to step over to help him, but he shook his head angrily.

"Say it," he repeated. "For God's sake '." I don't know what you want me to say.
'Of course'.
Lucy was horrified. Everyone was looking at her. Then he remembered their previous conversation. He
was leading her to ask for the Grail Question, wasn't he? “What ails you?” she
asked hesitantly, the words echoing in the great hall.

'This false world, this hell, grieves me,' Sinclair replied. 'This world was created by the father of lies, the Prince of
Darkness. "He gritted his teeth. More and more blood ran down his leg.

Two Grail questions, Sinclair said, didn't he? "Who does the Grail serve?" Lucy asked, and for a moment she
could actually imagine herself as Perceval, the innocent fool.

"The false Grail serves Satan. The true Grail serves God.

Lucy stood up. For some reason, she was certain that there was a third issue, which had never been revealed,
because it was the key to this secret ceremony. "What is the true Grail?" she asked.

'You must choose. "

Lucy turned away from Sinclair and looked at the two golden tables. If she chose the spear and the chalice,
she would be choosing Christianity over Gnosticism, and vice versa, if she
chose the plate and the sword.
But Gnosticism was knowledge about hidden. Even in the most sacred ceremony, the truth was hidden
in some way. Something was missing.
She was convinced of this. There had to be mysticism, transcendent knowledge.
Could it be possible that the true Grail was not among these items? That would be the ultimate irony - the Grail
Hallows did not contain the Grail at all. As soon as she thought about it, she knew it was right. That was the
final secret. The Grail was an otherworldly object. He was beyond.

Walking slowly, aware of Sinclair's eyes desperately on her, she walked over to the copy of Rafael's mural.
She stared at him. The Grail was

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somewhere in that picture, the true Grail.
Placing her fingers against the bottom panels of the painting, she let her fingers run over the separate panels. Just as she reached her own panel in the center of the baseline, she realized something wasn't right. There were thin cuts down the sides of the panel. As she pushed with her fingers, the panel gave way. The brim had been deliberately cut off on it. Carefully, she lifted the lid. Behind her was a small alcove, the size of a large brick, with a carved wooden box embedded in it. She opened the box door and looked inside.

It contained a beautiful emerald globe, the size of a paperweight. Taking it, she turned to the others.

'This is the Grail. "Now she understood exactly what was expected of her. She walked over to Sinclair and, without hesitation, pressed the emerald orb against his open wound.
Sinclair's thigh glowed. All of his veins and arteries were visible through his cloak and shiny chain mail. She could practically see the blood vessels repairing themselves, sucking back the lost blood. Second, the mortal wound had been healed.

Sinclair stood up, smiling. "Only once before has the ceremony been successfully completed: For Galahad, and now for Lucy Galahan, the new Galahad'
Lucy didn't know what to say. She was crushed.
"The real Holy Grail never had anything to do with Christ," said Sinclair. "It was no chalice and was never used at the Last Supper. No blood was ever collected. We invented this story to deceive Christians. The rumors about the Cathars with the Grail on Montségur were true. They smuggled it the night before the castle surrendered to the Crusaders. And now I will call the Holy Grail by its true name - the Stone of Lucifer.

Lucy was impressed.
Sinclair said that this stone was unique because it was the only material object in existence that was not created by Satan. Instead, Lucifer, the True Bright Angel of God, did so, his purpose to allow him to take on human form in this material world. He threw it from the sky into the Garden of Eden and used it to materialize in front of Eve. When Wolfram von Eschenbach spoke of the lapsit exillas - the exile stone, the stone of heaven - this was what he was talking about.

The stone was indestructible. He was taken to Atlantis where he survived the island's annihilation, but he disappeared from history for millennia, until the Templars found a document during their excavations of Solomon's Temple saying that the stone was in Scotland, at the site where Rosslyn Chapel was located. finally built.

The Templars recovered it and brought it to their main base in the south of France. They gave it to their brothers in the Cathars to inspire them in their fight against the Catholic crusaders. After being smuggled out of Montségur, it was hidden in the foundations of a small chapel, not far away, in the small hilltop village of Rennes-le-Château. Centuries later, in 1891, it was discovered by a Catholic parish priest when he was renovating his chapel. Father Bérenger Saunière's name was. When Sinclair's predecessors found out, they went to the priest and paid him a fortune for the stone. They did not reveal who they were or why they wanted the stone.

Overnight, Saunière went from being a poor nobody to an extremely

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rich and a great mystery was born.
Afterwards, he became obsessed with the realization that he was mistaken. He spent the rest of his life trying to solve the mystery, and learned as much as he could about the Cathars and Templars. He rebuilt the chapel into a

much grander style, but added several unorthodox features, for which he was condemned by his local bishop. Above the entrance he placed an inscription in Latin: Terribilis est locus de iste - This place is terrible. In the arch above the cemetery gate, he placed a stone sculpture of a Templar-style death's head.
Inside the chapel, he erected a realistically colored statue of a figure who was either the devil or the demon Asmodeus. According to Jewish legend, Asmodeus was the builder of Solomon's Temple and the guardian of humanity's greatest secret. There was little doubt Saunière had begun to realize the enormity of what he had found and of his crime against Catholicism by selling it to the enemies of his faith.
Sinclair said that Hitler then took ownership of the stone when he became Grand Master of the College. It was kept in Nürnberg with the other sacred treasures the Nazis took from across Europe.
Sinclair stopped talking - the grandfather clock at the back of the hall read striking midnight. 'April 30th is here,' he said. 'Last day of the world.'

ll over Lucy's body, goosebumps erupted. “What should happen?” she asked.

"Look at the stone," Sinclair ordered.
For a moment, nothing happened, then the inside of the ball seemed to fill with strange milky clouds. Through the clouds, Lucy noticed a small, bright crescent light. It was unlike anything I had ever seen: beautiful, peaceful, comforting. He filled her with a sense of well-being that she had never experienced in her life. The fear disappeared, his loneliness, all the hurt in his life. She felt loved, unconditionally, overpoweringly, as if her own parents were within that light. Then the light began to write, in letters of fire. Lucy gasped when she saw what was being uttered - her own name. Thus, it was completed, it disappeared, taking the light with it.

"What do you see?" Sinclair asked. 'My name - then disappeared.
"This stone is made of no ordinary material. Lucifer himself created it. It contains a glimpse of heaven, and gives the names of those who are ready to make the journey to paradise."

Sinclair smiled. "I will answer something that has always perplexed you - why some of the mercenaries fighting for the Cathars at Montsegur agreed to convert to Catharism time before the castle surrendered to the Crusaders, knowing they would die at the stake. It was because they participated in a sacred ceremony which the Cathars performed in the early hours of April 30.
During that ceremony, they saw their names written on the Lucifer stone, just as you did. They signed their own death warrants because they knew they would go straight to paradise.

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"When Section 5 interrogated Nazi officers at Nuremberg on April 30, 1945, exactly the same thing happened. The Nazis showed the Lucifer Stone to the American officers. Half saw nothing and the other half saw their names written on it.

They converted to Gnosticism and killed their non-Gnostic colleagues to prevent them from discovering the Gnostic conspiracy.

"They took the Lucifer Stone back to the United States with them. The Invisible College contacted them and instructed them on how they should proceed. For the past sixty-seven years, we have been meticulously planning this operation. That is why Morson and his men are here now.

“What about you? Why are you here?”

'My name is a corruption of the French name St Clair. My ancestors were Normans who settled in Scotland. St Clair comes from the Latin words Sanctus Clarus - sacred and clear. My family's purpose, our eternal purpose, was to clear the path to the world of the sacred. My family had the most involvement of any part of the long quest to right the wrongs of old. We are the pathfinders, the predestined Grail candidates.

He looked at Raphael's mural. 'It's time to tell you precisely why you're here, Lucy. Even though I have prepared you as well as I can, I have no idea how you will react when you hear exactly what you should do. "

'What are you saying? "

"I'm saying that if there is such a thing as an unimaginable inconceivable act - this is it."

inclair took Lucy to the mural. "This shows that our mission began before the human race even existed. Isn't that amazing?"

"How can it be?

"Use your intuition, Lucy. You know this mural better than anyone."

Lucy closed her eyes. On some level, she understood perfectly. Far from being complicated, it was simple. He told the story of God and his two main angels, Lucifer and Satanael, the latter becoming known as Satan.

Absurdly, Lucifer and Satan came to be regarded as the same person when they were precise opposites. Lucifer, the angel of light, was God's most loyal angel, his favorite. Satanael, the angel who was on the left side of God, was jealous of Lucifer and, above all, of God. Satanael had the gift of intelligence.

He was fiercely, devilishly intelligent. Smart enough to think he could defy God.

The mural was the story of how Satanael attempted to overthrow God, only to be defeated in a cataclysmic war of light as the entire universe lit up in every color: the biggest, brightest light show in history. To avenge his defeat, Satanael created the earth, establishing himself as its God. Far from being a simplistic hell of demons torturing and tormenting the wicked, the

Earth was a laboratory where the most subtle and ingenious psychological warfare was waged against its population. Pleasure and hope were freely given as pain and

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despair. The worst hell, Satanael understood, is almost heaven, a false paradise offering tempting glimpses of happiness. One day you are in love and you think the world couldn't be better, the next day your lover leaves you, and life, in an instant, is intolerable. When love and hate, pleasure and pain are the closest neighbors, misery is maximized, suffering brought to its apogee.

God gave Lucifer the mission to go to earth to defeat Satanael. But, in his own realm, Satanael was far more powerful, forcing Lucifer to seek help from the inhabitants of Satanael's world.
It was essential to make them aware of the situation they were in, so Lucifer taught them
Gnosis - true knowledge. Cain was the first to rebel against Satanael's total tyranny. Its people took up the fight and the war has intensified ever since. Rafael's mural showed a coded representation of the fight, and how it would end, one way or another.

Lucy opened her eyes. 'But how come none of this is real? Science must judge this as absurd. "

"No," Sinclair replied. "Have you ever heard of the God particle?"
Lucy shook her head.
"Its technical name is the Higgs boson. In 1960, a Scottish physicist named Peter Higgs predicted the existence of this elementary particle. He said that a field - the Higgs field -
permeates all of space. Any particles moving through space find in this field. Many, but not all,
particles that interact with it acquire mass.

"Quantum theory says that fields have always been associated with particles. For the electromagnetic field, the particle is the photon. For the Higgs field, that is the Higgs boson. No one has found one yet, but if they do will demonstrate the existence of the Higgs field and explain where the mass comes from.

'How does this relate to Gnosticism?
'Gnosticism says that there are two universes - one of light and one of matter. The true God rules the former, the false god the latter. The first is heaven, the second hell.'
"I understand," Lucy said. "You are saying that Satan created the Higgs field and the Higgs bosons. Without this, there would be no mass in the universe."
"Exactly. Far from being called the God particle, the Higgs boson should be renamed the Satan particle.
The entire material world - hell itself - owes its existence to this particle. Without it, there would be no gravity, without the theory of relativity, there is no wave-particle duality, no Heisenberg
uncertainty principle, no Bell inequality theorem, no quantum indeterminacy.

"When Satan created mass, he also created time. Time, in the universe of light, has no meaning. Pure light does not decay. It is eternal. Remove the

Satan particle and nothing would do age. There would be no death, no sickness, no disease, no misery, no suffering, no pain. "
"But aren't we going to lose everything that makes us human?
"No, in the universe of the True God, where the Satan particle possesses no influence, all our joys are magnified a trillion times. It is an eternal, immortal paradise. The souls that inhabit this realm are not subject to gravity. They can flying, rising as high as they like, diving as far as they like. The restrictions imposed by the material universe are removed.

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"For humanity, it is impossible to imagine a universe without mass. The whole of science is based on the existence of mass. Without it, everything changes. The laws of science are transformed."

"Why did the true God destroy the material universe?"
"He can not."
'What do you mean?'
"God is perfect light. He cannot interact with the material universe. To do so would make him imperfect and impossible."
"But other things can interact with the material world."
'That's the paradox. When God creates something, it must, logically, contain imperfection. If he didn't, he would be too perfect, and therefore indistinguishable from God. This is impossible - there can only be one God. Thus, all of God's creations are imperfect and that is why they are susceptible to the attraction of the material universe, which can interact with the Higgs field.
God is pure light, but all of his creations contain varying degrees of darkness.
'Satan used his dark arts to make his world seductive to all those with a trace of darkness in their souls. Only two people were immune. God himself, and Lucifer, the angel of light. ""
But why did God create Satan?
'Light needs darkness to exist. If there was nothing but light, we would all be blind. Contrast allows us to see. Satan was the Angel of Darkness, counterbalancing Lucifer.

'Lucifer and Satan were the two great enemies, the light and the dark, the right hand of God against the left, the righteous against the sinister. In the world of the True God, Lucifer shines brighter than any other created being, while Satan is all-consuming darkness. In Satan's material world, the situation is reversed. Now Satan is the brightest light and Lucifer infinitely dark. For this reason, Satan is able to call Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness'.

Lucy pointed to the top panels in the mural. One feature stood out as if it was painted using a special, bright pigment. The feature seemed to metamorphose into a physical object protruding from the mural. 'Satan created the Spear of Destiny, didn't he? " She said. "That's the key to all of this.

Sinclair smiled. 'Satan could do something with ordinary light which was impossible for God - he could corrupt it, make it heavy, perishable. He could

cause it to fold in on itself, decay. He believed that if he tried hard enough, he really could make it solid. He spent ages experimenting, trying to create mass. Endless attempts failed. Finally, he cracked the puzzle and created the first material object - a gun. This was the Spear of Destiny itself, and its aim was the impossible: to enable Satan to kill God.

"If Satan had succeeded, it would have been the first homicide in the history of the universe, and the greatest crime of all. The universe would have immediately ceased to exist, or been plunged into an icy darkness lasting forever, with Satan beginning a reign of terror. infinite.
"But when Satan threw the spear, while God was addressing the army of angels, it passed straight through God. Satan had not understood that God cannot interact with material things. The spear flew and hit Lucifer

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shoulder, injuring him.
"War broke out in heaven between the bright angels loyal to God and Lucifer and the dark angels who followed Satan. Lucifer's forces, drawing on the
power of God, triumphed, and Satan and his rebellious angels were cast into
the abyss, and cast of Satan fell with him.
"In the abyss, Satan worked long and hard to create the material universe that he alone would control. God had no power over him. The universe was now
divided into two, good and evil, light and dark, spirit and matter. God could not harm Satan, and neither could Satan harm God. The Manichaean dualism universe was born. The mystery of why the true God seemed to tolerate the existence of evil was no mystery at all. As a being of the purest, transcendent light, a kind of light that no one in the world can conceive, God simply cannot have any relationship with matter, so he cannot destroy it.

"God did not create evil, Satan did. God could not create evil. Evil is a property of darkness, not of light. Every soul was created by God and contains
divine light, but all souls also have darkness within them and can exist in the material world.The dilemma facing every soul is to resist the seduction of the material world and embrace the light of God.
'Satan made the earth the center of his material universe. Earth is the domain of the dark
lord, hell itself. Satan placed the Spear of Destiny in the center of the Garden of Eden, knowing it would become the cause of war and violence. "So it was.
Abel found the spear and tried to kill Cain with it, but Cain fought it off and killed him instead. Cain, the son of Lucifer and Eve, was Satan's enemy on Earth. Satan could have killed Cain at any time, but now he saw the perfect way to spread discord and conflict forever. Humanity would never be free from conflict and suffering. Satan's lineage, the descendants of Adam and Eve, would wage eternal war against Lucifer's lineage, the descendants of Lucifer and Eve. With the same mother, the two lineages would have much in common, which is why it is so difficult to distinguish them.

'Cain and all his descendants were marked by Satan with the mark of Cain, but it was a sign that appeared only once a year, on the birthday of

Abel's death at Cain's hands. Furthermore, he only appeared on the Cainite's forehead holding the weapon used to kill Cain Abel - the Spear of Destiny.
"There's one thing I didn't tell you about the Spear of Destiny, the most important fact of all. It can't kill the true God, but it can kill anyone in the universe -
any human being, any angel.
'Can you kill your Creator? " Lucy asked, and started to shake. It was terribly obvious now that Sinclair was asking her to do it.
The smallest of smiles tugged at the corners of Sinclair's mouth. 'You're asking me to kill God, aren't you?' Lucy could barely believe the words
emerging from her mouth. 'That's what it's about. That's what the mural is representing. That's what your mission is. This is why the world may be about to end. It all depends on me. The Spear of Destiny is the only weapon that can do so. '

"It's not God you have to kill," Sinclair replied harshly. "It's Satan.
We're asking you to kill the greatest monster that ever lived. "

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"I am not a Gnostic. I was raised Catholic.
"Everyone who is not a Gnostic is a Devil worshiper. It's as simple as that.
You know as well as anyone what a valley of suffering this world is. You can end this hell on earth, you can heal the divided universe. In one fell swoop, you can bring an end to evil, suffering and pain. Every soul trapped in this world will be released. Let us all return to the true light, we will all be reunited under the rule of the one true God. This is the most important task in history, Lucy, the most sacred task ever given to any human being. Whether you like it or not, you are the chosen one.

"But you're talking about killing the Creator. That's impossible."
"Don't you understand anything? It is impossible to kill God, but not Satan. He himself is a created being and everything created can be destroyed."

But how to do it? I mean the actual process. "It's right in
front of you. The mural shows all the ingredients, everything that must be put into practice before the deed can be accomplished."
Lucy looked at him again. 'Everything designed to overthrow God must, in the end, overthrow its creator. "

"Precisely," said Sinclair. "It is justice, the completion of the circle, the only way this
could end. Satan must die by his own weapon. The first weapon must be the last. The eternal conflict will end when Rex Mundi's own evil is turned against him. He took Lucy by the shoulders. "How could you be forgiven if you don't do it? You would be the greatest criminal in history, the eternal criminal, reviled until the end of time.

Lucy was there, practically paralyzed.
'I understand what you're saying,' she said, hesitantly, 'but at the same time, I don't know. You don't know what you're asking me to do.'

"I am asking you to end the horror. I am asking you to fulfill the prophecy. You came into the world for precisely this reason, this one moment in time, this one action. It is your purpose, your destiny. You cannot refuse.
"But by killing the Lord, I kill your creation too. The world ends. Everyone dies. Six billion people. I can't do this, I can't.
'Only Satan dies, and his material world. Darkness will be the only thing left to
commemorate your ill-fated existence. As for the rest of us, our physical bodies will certainly perish, but our eternal souls will instantly return to paradise. It will be over in a single flash. No one will suffer.
From mortality to immortality, from hell to heaven, in the time it takes for the spear to penetrate
Satan's heart. "

"How do I know you're right?
"You've always known this. Your book is called The Unholy Grail: The Secret Heresy. Okay, you knew there were two competing religions. This fight has been going on since the dawn of time. You get it. Not the precise details, but you intuited the big picture. The essence of his book is exactly the same: two rival gods, one of them true, false. The legend of the Holy Grail has always been one thing and one thing only - a coded reference to the search for the identity of the true God . All those who manage to join God in heaven, all those who are not condemned to hell, life after life of

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despair. An endless wheel of human misery. Until now.
Lucy continued to look at the depictions of the Spear of Destiny on the mural. They were flashing, glowing with a vivid blue color. She could almost reach out and touch them.
'Like every Grail Quester, you are always searching for the truth, Lucy. Place your faith in the one true God. Let his divine light guide you.'

'But I'm not the first to be in this position, am I? Others have been here before me.'

"It is not exactly so, but it is true that Cain's priesthood has met in this way four times before. The first time was in ancient Atlantis. His attempt to carry out his sacred mission went disastrously wrong and Atlantis was wiped from the face of the earth." The second time was when the great Cathar families of France came together to form the Knights Templar. They went to Jerusalem to discover the ancient treasures and secrets of Solomon's Temple, which would allow Cain's destiny to be fulfilled. The Inquisition detained him before he could finish his work." The third time was when the Freemasons came together to create the United States of America - the Templars' fable Merica, the new Atlantis. But many secrets were lost and they were not able to discover the whereabouts of the Hallows' Grail." The fourth time was when the Nazis thought they had assembled the entire Hallows Grail. They held the ceremony in the ruins of Montségur, but nothing happened. They failed because three of their Grail Hallows, and the Ark of the Covenant, were fake. Sinclair explained that the Nazis were completely unaware of Raphael's hidden mural. It was only when he became a senior Vatican figure that things changed. Rumors circulated that the Pope kept visiting the tomb of Pope Julius II. Sinclair befriended the Pope's most trusted aide and, after years of perseverance, managed to recruit him to the cause of Gnosticism. 'You killed the Pope, didn't you?' Lucy said. Sinclair nodded. 'The Pope's aide, Wearing special gloves, he handed the Pope a note impregnated with an undetectable poison. We needed the Vatican to be in crisis. We assassinated the American president for the same reason.

Without these two symbols of temporal and spiritual power, the world would be rudderless at the moment of its greatest danger. 'You've already thought of something, haven't you?' 'There is no room for error. If we don't get it right this time, we'll never have another chance. "'You didn't tell me the most important thing of all.' 'What do you mean?' Destiny is useless if you can't make it happen. "'We have Jehovah.' Sinclair smiled. "In a box. 'What are you talking about?' 'Jehovah is just a mile away, at our final destination.'"

I don't understand. 'Sinclair pointed out Raphael's mural. 'The Ark of the Covenant, Lucy, that's where the Lord lives. The Ark is waiting for you - at Glastonbury. There's 80t time to finish this.' Sinclair ordered his knights to collect the Grail Relics. and the head and bones of Baphomet, and take them to the trucks parked outside. Several soldiers escorted each of the knights. Gresnick and James were pushed forward at gunpoint. "Burn the castle," said Sinclair Morson. 'We're not going back.

"As Morson collected some cans of gasoline from a storage area and doused the hall, Lucy wondered why Sinclair was so confident. It seemed ridiculous to say that he had God in a box, as if the Creator were a caged animal.
Surely the Lord could do whatever he wanted. This was his world. Even Sinclair said yes. “Why don't you have the Lord you killed?” she asked. "Why did he allow you to get this far? If he was as powerful as you say, he wouldn't let you take another step towards him. You would never have been able to arrest him."

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lo.'Lucy, everything in this world is part of Jehovah. The law of conservation of mass-energy - the first law of thermodynamics - says that mass-energy can neither be created nor destroyed. When Jehovah created the material universe, he had to use a great deal of his personal energy to bring it about. All matter, dark matter and dark energy, that physicists study are all born of the Lord, and are imbued with His evil essence.
A lot of energy was also channeled into the Spear of Destiny. The result is that Jehovah is weak now, with little of the power you would expect. Shaking the planet with his brute, spiteful earthquakes is the best he can do." What the Bible keeps secret is that the Spear of Destiny was always paired with the Ark of the Covenant. The High Priest of Solomon's Temple used the spear to direct Jehovah's energy. Without him, Jehovah's remaining energy cannot be focused. That is why he is now striking so wildly and indiscriminately, causing catastrophes throughout the world. But without the spear, he is blind. see, he cannot reach us with his power.

As long as we don't have his spear, we are invulnerable. Sinclair's explanation made some kind of strange feeling, but Lucy remained doubtful. She wasn't even sure Sinclair knew what the right spear was. For her, it was what she found in the chapel at Cadbury, not the one Hitler took from Vienna. "Come on," said Sinclair as Morson took a candle and set the petrol on fire. Flames immediately engulfed three sides of the castle. They ran out of the main entrance, the fire chasing them. Sinclair clutched the Lucifer Stone. It was an extraordinary object, but Lucy still struggled to accept that it was the true Holy Grail. Strangely enough, that somehow made the perfect candidate: unexpected, elusive, enigmatic. Above all - if Sinclair was right - it was an object not of this world. What could be more appropriate as the Holy Grail?" And about the captain of the Morson? She asked as they walked out into the outer courtyard. "You said there was something special about him. Sinclair' Special? It almost seemed fun. "If my name is special, the captain is unique." "Lucius something," said Lucy.

"He has the male version of my name." "His name is Lucius Ferris, Lucy. When he looked at the stone, it didn't show his name. For him, the effect when he touched it was completely different. "Lucius Ferris. There was something familiar about the name. Lucy felt cold despite the fierce heat of the burning castle. 'Why are you blocking this?'
Sinclair asked. "You already know the meaning of the captain's name." Lucy shook her head, but the name was pulsing through her mind like a flash, digging into her unconscious. Lucius Ferris. My God, it was so obvious. It was one of the oldest names of all, a name before its time. When the captain held the stone, he did not show his name, for a simple reason. The stone was his. Lucius Ferris - Lucifer.The stone was designed to transform Lucifer into a human being. It could do the reverse as well - transform a suitable human being into Lucifer. He had changed the captain into an angel, a black angel, the most famous angel of all. All together, that was the presence she felt, first at Tintagel, then at Cadbury and finally at Cheddar Gorge. Lucifer was walking the earth. "He is waiting for us at our final destination," said Sinclair.

"He's at Glastonbury Tor with the Ark of the Covenant. "Lucifer at Glastonbury? It seemed crazy. The early Christian leader Tertullian was famous for saying: It is right because it is impossible. Lucy had always found a crazy statement. Now it seemed like the cornerstone of logic. The two trucks were waiting on the other side of the yard. They now had huge skulls emblazoned on their sides: white on a red background, the No Quarter signal to the enemy. Pirate trucks, Lucy thought, making the route to the end of the world. As they climbed into the trucks, Lucy caught James's attention, but

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he turned and ran to the other truck. Gresnick lowered his head and also headed toward another truck. It seemed no one wanted to look at her: not Sinclair, not Morson, not any of the soldiers and knights. Nobody. When she sat in the back corner, she felt like she had been branded an untouchable. Maybe they were right to avoid it. What Sinclair was proposing was beyond comprehension. As far as she could see -
Sinclair had carefully avoided spelling it - she was expected to stab the Spear of Destiny into the Ark of the Covenant. Just as it had killed Jesus Christ, the spear would somehow kill God, or, at any rate, what most people call God. For the Gnostics, the god inside the Ark was Satan, but it was impossible for Lucy to shake the beliefs she was raised with. For her, she was being invited to slaughter God, the one, the only, the Creator. It seemed an inconceivable act, but Sinclair was certain it could be done. She did not share his confidence. She suspected it would be a ceremony that ended in failure like all previous attempts - like her life.
Like love? The only person on Earth who would never betray her was James, but he had. The unthinkable, the unimaginable: it still happened. That was the truth of life. Mankind's Holy Grail was never anything but an unholy Grail. She couldn't make up her mind. A moment when the idea of the world ending in his hands seemed absurd. Even if she could do it, she wouldn't. A moment later, she could imagine nothing better than ending this atrocious display once and for all. Rimbaud said: Life is the farce that everyone has to perform. Was her role in bringing down the final curtain in the great farce? When the blood ran down her legs in Cheddar Gorge, it was as if her own body turned against her. Did he understand what she was being asked to do? The material world was full of suffering. Look at all the poverty and pain, the lies, cruelty and violence, the endless wars and madness. He deserved to end. Your greatest benefactor would be the person who put you out of your misery. Does it really fall to a person to end it? With her? How was she one of the leaders of the Cold War, with all the apocalyptic nuclear codes in her briefcase, her finger resting on the red button ready to unleash final destruction? Those old politicians were prepared to do it. Why not her? But if it did, it would be killing billions. She would be the greatest homicidal maniac in history, the ultimate outcast. Would anyone want that to be their epitaph, even if there was no one else to look after it? The trucks drove slowly along the snow-covered roads leading to Glastonbury. Lucy tried to block out what was coming. Sinclair, who had been sitting near the back door of the truck, made his way around to sit with her. "I know it's hard for you to come to terms with all of this," he said. "The truth is that everything clashes with you, all the forces of history." Lucy was surprised at what Sinclair then said to her. His mother was a Jew who could, he said, trace her lineage all the way back to Seriah, the last high priest of Solomon's Temple. This meant that she was a descendant of Aaron, Moses' brother. It was essential that she belong to this lineage because the Ark could not function properly unless one of Aaron's descendants was present. The Gnostics' attempt at Atlantis had gone catastrophically wrong because that person was not there. The Nazis didn't either, and one of the reasons was that they refused to have a Jew among them. This time, the Invisible College had ensured that everything was done correctly. "Are you saying that my father didn't marry my mother out of love? Was it arranged?" As it turned out, his father loved his mother, but he didn't. it was supposed. All that was required of him was to have a child with her.

Your father can trace his line back to Cain. We have unbroken records dating back

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10,000 years, named after Cain the first. His lineage could not be more illustrious - with Cain at his father's side, and Aaron, apatriarch of the Levite priesthood, at his mother's. You were raised Catholic in an attempt to disguise your true heritage." Lucy shook her head. No wonder she was at war with herself. Her blood was practically fighting itself. A Catholic, a Jew and a Gnostic all in one. If the legend was true that Lucifer was the true father of Cain, then she had supernatural elements in her blood, an innate hatred of Jehovah, but she also had the blood of Aaron, one of the most revered figures of Jehovah's Chosen People. And she was a Catholic, the religion that was the historical enemy of Jews and Gnostics. "The side of Raphael's final mural panel is the summary of this ancient struggle," said Sinclair. Lucy imagined it instantly: which presented the city of Rome in a mirror with the Vatican displayed upside down on an egg timer. The proper name of Rome is Roma," Sinclair said. "Rome in a Mirror spells Love. Love is the Cathar word for love. The Cathars considered Rome as a symbol of temporal power, of Satan's kingdom. Love was the antidote, the opposite of everything Rome represented. Love was spiritual power , the kingdom of light. Rome against Love is the eternal war. 'Love can be divided into a greater sense without death in the Cathars' language. That is the prize Love offers - immortality, immortality, the final version of Satan's hell We all have to decide which side we're on: Rome or Love." The truck stopped. "We're here," Sinclair said. "It's time, Lucy." The others got out of the truck, leaving Sinclair alone with Lucy. For a second, he held his hand against her cheek and she trembled. Her father used to do this too. He got out of the truck then helped her down, never taking his eyes off her. Was he wondering what he would do if he were in his position? But he wouldn't hesitate, would he? They had parked in front of Glastonbury's famous Chalice Well gardens. Lucy could hardly believe she was here, just a few hundred meters from her convent. Beginnings and endings - always the same. Scientists have said that the universe began with a Big Bang.

Was this how he was going to end up too? She would pierce the Ark of the Covenant with the Spear of Destiny and cause a second Big Bang to reverse the first. With the apocalyptic explosion, hell would end forever. Let there be light. Perhaps those were the words spoken before the original Big Bang. Satan say them? Jehovah? Allah? God? Sir? Christ? Do these names mean anything anymore? Through a blinding explosion, the material world was born. Through a burst of mail that would die. Eternal osimetry. The perfect circle. As you ran forward, you simply returned faster to where you started. Morson opened the iron garden gates and everyone entered.

Although the rest of Glastonbury was covered in snow, the gardens were untouched by a single flake. At Carbonek, blue floodlights lit up everything. They walked along a cobblestone path under a living arch of ivy intertwined with great oak beams, past two large yew trees - trees sacred to Druids, Lucy remembered - and then past a summerhouse and a pair of benches overlooked by a sculpture of an angel. They arrived at one of Glastonbury's most visited landmarks - a Holy Thorn. Automatically, Lucy remembered the legend. Joseph of Arimathea, it was said, took his staff to the land at Glastonbury, and it miraculously took root and blossomed into a Holy Thorn tree. The tree that stands here now, was a direct descendant of the original sacred tree and famously bloomed at two special times each year - Christmas and Easter. The perfect Christian tree. They soon arrived at Chalice Well. Lucy always found it incredibly beautiful. She could stand here for hours looking at it, fixed on its little sunken stone circle, especially at sunset when it was

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bathed in a golden-brown glow. The opening of the well was covered by an oak lid, covered in an intricate design showing the vesica piscis - a sacred geometric symbol in which the circumference of one circle passed through the center of a second identical circle - with a 'bleeding spear' pass through the middle of the two circles. It seemed to represent the task confronting Lucy. She would have to take the spear and destroy the two corresponding circles: the beginning and the end. She stared blankly, trying to keep her emotions under control. control. This was where, the legend claimed, Joseph originally hid the Holy Grail, the very chalice she had just recovered from Carbonek. Sinclair pulled away and Morson led the party through the exit, across a road, and into a snowy lane leading to Glastonbury Tor. They arrived at a circle of cherry trees, strangely in full bloom and preternaturally pink, at the foot of the Tor. Lucy stood in the center. The trees were covered in untouched snow. The sky was changing again, generating an incredible display of fast-moving, colorful streamers, long filaments of light shining in the darkness. "The northern lights," Sinclair said. 'Earth's magnetic fields are reorienting. The night sky began to flicker; Huge sheets of rainbow lights, the frequency getting faster and faster, becoming dizzyingly fast. "The end is near," said Sinclair. Everyone ran through the cherry trees toward the Tor. Lucy wondered if apple trees were here. instead.

Glastonbury was reputed to be Avalon, the island of apples, gateway to the Other World, where Arthur's death was taken after the battle of Camlann.Glastonbury Tor itself was a large 500-foot-high teardrop-shaped mound . Everything was covered in snow: the scary white hill surrounded by flat land. On its crest was St. Michael's Tower, a remnant of a roofless old church. Where did Sinclair intend to go? To the top of Tor? Was the Ark of the Covenant inside St. Michael's Tower? Is that where Lucifer was waiting? "We're going inside," Sinclair said, turning one of the spotlights away from the cherry grove and pointing it at the foot of the Tor. He produced a small remote control and pressed a button. For a moment, nothing happened. Then came a creak. The section of slope began to slide to one side. God Almighty. A small stone corridor appeared, with a bronze door at the end, engraved with swastikas. All at once, Lucy realized the truth: Sinclair's organization had built a secret passage into the hill. "Come inside," said Sinclair. "All the answers are here. 81inclair went in first to open the bronze door, then called Lucy inside. Dragging down the small stone hallway, she imagined that hell was in front of her. Above the entrance - the Hellgate - was a bearing copper striptwo lines of Dante's Inferno.By justice was my heavenly creator moved I, also was created by eternal love.Lucy could accept that hell was created in the name of justice, but it confused her that anyone could think love eternal was involved.

How can a place of endless punishment be conjured into existence as an act of love? Was it conceivable that a God of love and forgiveness, as Christ claimed to be, could create a place of boundless pain, of sanctified suffering? It was a contradiction in terms, a category error. Wouldn't it be an act of eternal justice, to destroy hell? Does love seek you? Perhaps it was the ultimate mercy for him to be all in a flash of light - six billion souls delivered from Satan in one stroke. Something was welling up inside Lucy. Temptation? They would ask him to plunge a spear into a box and, with that simple act, they had promised that everything would be over. They said that the stars in the sky had moved billions of years to get to an alignment where she would be here now to do this. Does she have the

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right to act differently than she was ordered? The more she thought about the world's suffering, her own, the more she found the idea of ending it all irresistible. Destruction was what she desired. Euthanasia - a good death - for all humanity. Over a cataclysmic, painless instant. No one would know what had happened. Here, then, disappeared. If Sinclair was right, she would be killing Satan, destroying the author of evil once and for all. The only opportunity to cut off the ultimate evil from the universe. There is no more injustice, cruelty, sin and strife. Wouldn't it be a crime, a mortal sin, worst of all, not to go ahead? She went to the door and sighed when she realized that the Tor had been emptied. His eyes almost popped out of his head. Sinclair Gnostics, it seemed, had used all their wealth - King Solomon's missing treasure, the Knights Templar's lost treasure, the Nazis' looted treasures - to build the perfect setting for their Doomsday plan. It had been carved out of the rock of the Tor. The rock ceiling was painted to look like the cloudless blue sky of a perfect day, with an unshielded sun beating down so realistically that the heat was almost palpable. The walls were covered with a landscape of what was unmistakably ancient Jerusalem. The ground was laid with slabs of golden-brown sandstone. But this was all incidental to the main scene confronting Lucy. "This is a perfect recreation of King Solomon's Temple," said Sinclair. "The original nine Knights Templar found the precise plans for the construction of the Temple during their excavations on the Temple Mount." In front of Lucy was a long white rectangular building with protruding chambers on each side, giving it a stepped appearance. Three breathtaking objects stood in the Temple courtyard. Sinclair explained what they were. The first was a sacrificial altar, where animals could be slaughtered and burned as a ritual offering to Jehovah. The second was a huge bronze basin resting on the backs of twelve bull sculptures. There, the priests were able to wash their hands and feet. The water in the basin represented the Red Sea, and the bulls of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Directly in front of the temple were more bronze basins, five on each side, mounted on wheeled chariots, and bearing ornamental carvings of lions and palm trees. Any residual blood from the sacrifices was washed away here. Two bronze pillars guarded the entrance to the Temple, thus representing, Sinclair said, King Solomon and his father, King David. The pillars were referred to as Boaz and Jachin and played a key role in the rituals of Freemasonry. Legend said that the originals were hollow and contained the sacred writings of the ancient Hebrews. "Who did all this?" Lucy asked. "We've been working on it since the end of World War II. We used our influence to get the government to agree to the secret construction of a top-security nuclear command bunker inside the Tor. When the Cold War ended, the military complex was dismantled and we bought the site outright. We created what you see now, with the best craftsmen in the world. Everything is based on an idea over 800 years old. Ralph de Sudeley was the man who dreamed it all up '."Who?" Sinclair gave a sad smile. "Isn't it strange how many of history's greatest figures are so little known? Ralph de Sudeley was the man who discovered the true Ark of the Covenant." Lucy listened in amazement as Sinclair revealed the extraordinary story of the English Templars who found the hidden Ark in 1188 CE. Ralph deSudeley was the commander of a small Templar garrison stationed in the ruined city. of the Petra desert, tasked with protecting the lucrative trade route through the Shara Mountains.Lucy has always wanted to visit Petra, thanks to one of the Raiders of the Lost Ark films. In it, Indiana Jones discovered the Holy Grail in a temple

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extraordinary place known as the Treasury, carved into a huge cliff.
Fittingly, the ghost of a Templar guarded the Holy Grail. Now, it seems, the film had missed a trick. It was not the Holy Grail that was once hidden in the secret caves of Petra, but the Ark of the Covenant. "In 1188, Ralph de Sudeley was a Templar with no personal wealth," said Sinclair. "When he returned to England the following year he was one of the richest men in the world. He made several attempts to start excavation work at Glastonbury Tor, but the technology did not exist to do the work he wanted, so he wrote detailed plans of what he was proposing. DeSudeley had French ancestry and it was found that he knew Chrétien de Troyes. In fact, de Troyes helped devise his plan."With the approval of the Gnostic College, de Sudeley and de Troyes were responsible for the plan of burying the Grail Relics at sites associated with the Arthurian legends in southwest England. It was based on this plan that, centuries later, Pope Julius II, Grand Master of the Faculty, commissioned Raphael to paint the mural so that the secret locations would be preserved for all time in a safe place. ""But what about the Ark of the Covenant?" asked Lucy. "Since 1189, the Ark has been here at Glastonbury," Sinclair replied. 'De Sudeley was not able to excavate the Tor, but he did dig a small underground chamber. in which the Ark was kept, waiting for the day when his plan could be put into practice." "I don't understand," said Lucy. 'From Sudeley came decades after the original Templars. Didn't they find the Ark in the hidden passages of Solomon's Temple? Sinclair shook his head. 'The Ark was removed from Solomon's Temple by the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah in 597 BC, before the Temple was sacked by the invading Babylonians. In 586 BC, the Temple and the entire city of Jerusalem was destroyed as punishment for a Hebrew uprising, but the Ark had long since been removed to safety." In the second book of Maccabees it says: He came to the mountain where Moses went up and saw the inheritance of God. And when Jeremiah came there he found a hollow cave and he carried in there the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant and the Altar of Incense, and so he stopped at the door." This means that the Ark was hidden on either the mountain where Moses was shown the Promised Land, or the mountain where Moses spent 40 days and nights in communion with the Lord, we are being shown what the future held for the Jews if they kept their sacred covenant with Jehovah. De Sudeley decided that the latter was more likely. "So Ralph of Sudeley thought Jeremiah took the Ark to Mount Sinai in 597 BC, and that's where it stayed for the next 1800 years, is that what you're saying?" , until Sudeley discovered it - the first man to look at it since Jeremiah. The reason it couldn't be found was, surprisingly, that no one was sure where Mount Sinai was. It didn't exist on any map, and only the Ancient Israelites never called it by that name. From Sudeley, in his Templar fortress that guards the mountain passes around Petra, he became obsessed with solving the mystery. After much study of the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy describes the wanderings of the Jews After his escape from Egypt, he calculated that Mount Sinai must in fact be Jebel Al-Madhba - the Mountain of the Altar. This was the mountain into which the Treasury at Petra was cut. The Ark and the other items he soon discovered , were hidden in a secret chamber beneath the Treasury, exactly where Jeremiah left them all those centuries before.'Jeremiah hid the Ark there because that was where it was made in the first place. It was Jehovah's Holy Mountain, and it was from here that he was taken to Jerusalem. When he had to be removed from the Temple for safekeeping, there was nothing more logical than taking her back exactly

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where he came from. It was not hidden in any secret passages under the temple; it was not taken to Ethiopia, Babylon, Rome, southern France, Ireland or anywhere else. He simply retraced his original route, but in the opposite direction.' From Sudeley sent the Ark back to England - to Glastonbury, mythical Avalon. It was the scariest place he could think of in England. Once the Ark was taken from Mount Sinai to the Temple Mount, it was thought certain that it should be taken to another sacred mountain: Glastonbury Tor. He would never have been allowed to recreate Solomon's Temple on the crest of the Tor, so the next step obvious was to place it under the mountain instead of on it. By doing it this way, it served a second purpose - it demonstrated that the Lord was an underground being, a shameful creature lurking in the dark.' But why did the Gnostics recreate the temple of the god they hated? "Isn't it obvious? - To destroy it. Jehovah appears only in specific conditions. He gave Moses precise instructions for building the Ark, and gave Solomon detailed plans for building the Temple to house the Ark. If any of the rules are transgressed, he will not appear. That is the reason why previous attempts to kill Jehovah failed. This time there will be no mistakes.

We built Jerusalem in England of green and pleasant land, just as it says in William Blake's poem. Jehovah appeared before the high priests of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, and now he will appear before them, the last descendant of the last high priest, in this exact replica of Solomon's Temple in this New Jerusalem. Lucy turned around. The plan seemed both brilliant and insane at the same time. Now, she understood, it wasn't a matter of poking a spear into a box. They were really intending to evoke Jehovah. It would then be the task to pierce him, just as Longinus pierced Christ. The others had spread out and looked with reverence at everything around them.

Gresnick and James stood on opposite sides of the bronze basin, looking at the sparkling water. Lucy wondered what James was thinking. There was a gulf between them and now he broke her heart. Before this was all over, she wanted a chance to be alone with him, give him a big hug, maybe, or even hold his hand, even if just for a moment. Even if he betrayed her, she forgave him. The figure that appeared without warning in the corner of her vision took her completely by surprise. No one else had noticed him, sneaking out of a recess beneath the sacrificial altar. Unlike everyone else, the man's face was contorted with hatred. It took him a moment to realize that the uniform was both familiar and wrong. That face. He was Kruger's brother. He must have followed them all the way to Cadbury and crept up behind them while they were distracted by the wonderful views. 'Behold the Antichrist,' he shouted to Lucy. 'His name is Abaddon, Azreal, Apollyon. There was an object in his hand. . He tossed and turned the sandstone to his feet. A hand grenade, without its pin.82 moment. An entire life. Lucy saw the grenade bobbling towards her. With each time, it seemed to move slower and slower. The world had dissolved in slow motion, moving frame by frame. She looked at the faces around her, each one showing their awareness that as soon as the grenade exploded they would all die. The Big Bang they had planned so carefully had shrunk to a small bang here and now. Sinclair looked pale. Morson's mouth was open, Gresnick's eyes were wide. As for James, who was doing what no one else was… he was diving for the grenade. She caught a glimpse of his face. There was so much regret in his eyes, self-loathing, sadness. But it wasn't love there either, love she had never seen before. All consuming, indestructible, painful. James managed to cover the grenade with his body.

Words tried to come out of Lucy's mouth, but nothing came, as if they collided and destroyed

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each other before they could escape: No, James. I love you. I forgive him. I can not live without you. Then James seemed to glow, his diaphragm becoming almost transparent with the intensity of the light. He was like an angel, much brighter than everyone around him. But then the light went out and he seemed to begin to fragment, little stars falling from him. There is no sound. Absolutely nothing. Time sped up again, Dreamtime giving way to real time. Now sound came, such a shattering noise, carrying so much destruction. Breaking bones, tearing flesh, rupturing blood vessels. Pieces of James's body flew out onto the sandstone, under the blue-painted Judean sky. Lucy smelled of burning flesh. Wisps of smoke rose from James' body. Little sputters of red were everywhere, her life force draining away. Lucy tried to move, but her legs resisted. She wanted to be with James, to kiss him - the last kiss, the kiss to make all future kisses mere shadows. James twisted around, panting, with his upper body almost separated from the smaller one. A hole was where his abdomen should have been. Sticky, Hell intestines. Charcoal skin.Lucy was finally able to move and she crouched over James. He was mumbling something. She put her ear to his mouth, asking if he was saying I love you, fearing he might be begging for her forgiveness. She couldn't bear it. Everything he had done, she was responsible for. She was the culprit, the one who had violated love. In little more than a hiss, James whispered, "Such beauty." Lucy looked at him, in agony. The life was slipping away from him. She could practically see his memories shutting down one by one. With each of these thoughts disappearing, parts of him were dying as well. They say they live on in the memories of those who know us, but that means we die too when those memories perish. With a final effort, James reached out and grabbed Lucy's shoulder, his lips seeking hers. 'Let the birds sing, Lucy,' he said. 'Let them sing to you how much I loved you.' He fell back, his eyes looking lifeless from his pale face. Lucy wanted to cry, but no sound came out. To her right, Kruger's brother had been stabbed by one of the knights and was lying on his back, a sword buried in his chest, blood spreading all over his body onto the sandstone. Tears were streaming down Lucy's face. She couldn't believe it. that James was dead. When she took his hand, she felt the heat from his body dissipating. Soon he was cold. In his mind, blue. Into the blue. And never leaving again. 83ounds. Voices. Faces were staring at Lucy. She saw their lips moving, but she couldn't understand anything they were saying. Sinclair grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her. She felt her torso springing back and forth. The movement reassured her somehow. She still She could feel it. She could channel her anguish into that movement. Sinclair's voice began to penetrate. "You may end up in this valley of suffering," he was saying. 'Now, more than ever, you can see why this pain has to end. "But overlaying Sinclair's words, she heard James's dying voice. So much beauty. Why did he say that? It didn't make sense. He said he wanted the birds to sing of his love for her. Why didn't he just say "Get up," Sinclair shouted. Lucy struggled to her feet, trying not to look at James, already trying to forget him. If she didn't, she wouldn't be able to take another step. and just disappear. Sinclair grabbed her hand and dragged her away. She saw Gresnick. There was a look in his eyes. Shame, regret it? It made her feel sick. They walked up some marble steps, past Boaz and Jaquim, the two tall bronze columns, and entered the porch of the Temple.

The floor was patterned marble, in black and white squares. The strange coldness

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spread through the air. And something else was very palpable - the feeling of an unspeakably unreal presence nearby. Sinclair kept talking to her and Lucy tried her hardest to concentrate. There was something comforting about the little details he described. They took him out of James's mind, out of the darkness spreading through his mind like black smoke. They crossed the porch and into the Hekal: the holy place. The walls were covered with cedar wood, with beautiful carved cherubs, palm trees and flowers, all covered in gold. The floor, Sinclair said, was made of firm wood, again covered in gold, making it shine and shine with an almost unearthly shine. At the other end, golden chains isolated the next room. They passed the Tablets of Bread, six on each side, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. These were ornate goldplated tables bearing gold plates of bread and goblets of wine, symbolizing the flesh and blood correspondence. Sinclair removed the gold chains and ascended the marble staircase then stood in front of the gold-edged, olivewood doors of the Sanctum Sanctorum. - the Holy of Holies - the last stop on their journey. Above the doors was a Latin inscription Et in Arcadia Ego. Sinclair pointed at him. "This has nothing to do with the temple," he said. "It is one of the most sacred phrases of Gnosticism, which is why we put it there. It translates E as in Arcadia I. This means that even in an apparent paradise, such as the land of Arcadia, the Evil One is still present. It is also an anagram for I TegoArcana Dei, which means Go away! I hide the secrets of God. I suppose you could say we appreciated the irony of placing the message above this shrine to Satan. Turning to the others, Sinclair said, ' We have come to a final act, my brothers. The curtain is about to fall and never rise again. I wish everyone could see the last performance, but there is not room for everyone. The knights, Morson and I will accompany Lucy into the Devil's lair . Colonel Gresnick too. It's only fair that one of them should be present to witness the end of everything they've mistakenly believed in for so long. He can represent the billions of fools who have chosen to live their lives believing Satan's lies." The rest of you will have to remain on guard out here. If there is any sign of difficulty, don't hesitate to come in. Otherwise, let me thank you all and wish you God's speed. Providence willing, we will soon find ourselves again in paradise in the company of the True God, with all the horrors of Satan consigned to history, with evil forever purged from the universe. Blessed are those who ended the Devil's reign of terror. This land was born in evil, and darkness. With a righteous flash of light, the sin of sins will be redeemed, all the imprisoned souls freed, the eternal crime atoned for. The words drift past Lucy like ghosts.

They seemed so great, so right, but perhaps this whole enterprise was a stupendous mistake, the very work of Satan. He remembered something the philosopher Nietzsche said: It's not doubt, it's certainty that drives men crazy. Wouldn't that be the true answer to humanity's suffering? - So that everyone can doubt, to admit that they were not sure about anything. Maybe there was a God, maybe there wasn't. Maybe Satan existed, maybe not. Maybe nothing was good, and nothing bad. Perhaps all the commandments were debatable. After all, the Jews preached Thou Shalt Not Kill, but they believed in the death penalty by stoning, they believed in the massacre that accompanied war, they believed in ritual sacrifice. To judge them for their actions, they preached nothing but killing. Maybe Jesus wasn't the Messiah, maybe the Bible wasn't the Word of God, maybe it doesn't matter one bit if you don't keep the Sabbath holy. Maybe there was no need to slaughter others because they didn't agree with you, there's no need to burn their

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heretics, to cut off infidels' heads, to stone sinners to death, to set up death camps, to blithely condemn endless billions to eternal suffering in hell because their beliefs were not the same as yours. Perhaps the people simply had to shrug their shoulders and say, 'Sorry, I don't know.' Before they entered, Sinclair opened a cabinet of gold and brought out special clothes for everyone to wear. embedded with twelve precious stones of different colors, each bearing the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Apparently, these were the protective clothing that the ancient Hebrew high priests had to wear whenever they approached the Ark. Sinclair left nothing to chance. When everyone was ready, he paused for a moment and then, without a word, opened the doors. and entered the Holy of Holies, brushing past veils of blue, violet, red and gold. Lucy followed with the others. At first, she didn't lift her eyes resolutely looking at the floor and wainscoting, both made of cedar covered with gold. When she looked up, the walls were the same - cedar covered in gold. The sheets of beaten gold were engraved with passages, Lucy presumed, the Torah. "Look up," said Sinclair. Lucy stood up straight. She was in a room shaped like a perfect cube, every surface gleaming gold. There were no windows.
All the light in the room came from seven five-branched candelabra. There was also a seven-branched candelabra - the famous Menorah, the emblem of Judaism and emblem of the State of Israel. Lucy had no doubt that it was one hundred percent genuine, one of the most sacred relics of antiquity. Guarding the door were two giant solid gold cherubs, wings spread wide, touching the walls on both sides and meeting in the center of the door. room. At the rear was an extraordinary shimmering curtain made of gold leaf, drawn from across the room. A few feet in front of him, in the exact center of the Holy of Holies was the golden Ark of the Covenant itself, as marvelous as the legends proclaimed, shining like the sun. I had seen many depictions in paintings and films, but nothing came close to capturing its beauty. It was simply divine. It rested upon a breath-taking crystal altar, transparent but filled with brilliant iridescent lights as if a living rainbow were trapped within. Around the altar, a silver pentagram was inscribed on the floor.
"We placed the Ark within the most powerful black magic symbol of them all," said Sinclair. "Legend says that the Lord has a pentagram on his forehead. We are using his own weapons against him." As Lucy studied the pentagram, she noticed that the inner lines of this famous symbol formed a very familiar shape - a pentagon. A shiver passed through her. Could it be possible that the American military chose the Pentagon design for its most famous building because its leaders were secret Gnostics? It wasn't by chance, it's not a coincidence, is it? This was all real. Thousands, tens of thousands of men and women had conspired over ten millennia so that she could be here at this moment to carry out this task. The child of destiny. Directly beneath the Ark's altar was an ugly stone that seemed out of place among so much beauty, but was also magnificent in the earth. She wondered what it was and why it was there. "So this is it," said Sinclair, "the abode of the Creator: God, Jehovah, Yahweh. Or, to give him his rightful titles, the demiurge, Rex Mundi, the Lord of the Flies, the Prince of Darkness, the Devil, Satan. Lucy didn't know what to say. She was overcome with emotion. “Everything is in place,” said Sinclair. “In a matter of minutes, everything will be over. " "I never imagined it would be so beautiful," said Lucy. Tears filled his eyes. James's voice refused to leave his head. There is so much beauty. It was almost as if he had seen this Holy of Holies before he died, the last vision of taking with

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him on his final journey. "He transcends beauty, doesn't he?" said Sinclair. "This is how Satan works. He makes his material world seductive beyond our ability to resist. This is the sparkling net into which many of us have fallen. Nothing seems so beautiful, so tempting, as Satan's world. Only When the net closes around us we have the first inkling that we have condemned ourselves. We are the self-condemned, those who have passed the Last Judgment on ourselves. And only you can redeem our error and save us." Lucy pointed out to the strange stone beneath the Ark 'What is this?"' It is the Stone of Bethel on which Jacob laid his head: the Stone of Destiny upon which Scottish kings were crowned. We have brought it here from its hiding place in Scone , in Scotland."But what is its connection with the Ark of the Covenant?"In Solomon's original Temple, the Ark rested on a large, flat limestone rock, which still exists on the Temple Mount today. The rock is known as still ha-Shetiyah. It is said to be the most important place on earth, exactly the center of the world. It was the cornerstone of creation, the first brick of the material world. Standing on that rock, Satan summoned all the rest of his dark creation into existence." When he was done, he wrote his secret name on the underside of the stone, then happily took a piece of the stone and threw it into the sky. air. It fell at Bethel, and when Jacob laid his head on it long afterward, he saw a vision of Solomon's Temple, and the Ark resting on the stone. What could be more appropriate in our recreation of Solomon's Temple of the who to place the Ark upon a block of the same ha-Shetiyah? - To undo the creation from which it all began. He signaled to his knights and four of them, the bearers of the Hallows Grail, stepped forward.

They placed the cup and spear on the left side of the Ark, and the plate and sword on the right. Sinclair went ahead and placed Lucifer's stone, the true Holy Grail, on top of the Stone of Destiny, to symbolize, he said, Lucifer's triumph over Satan's creation. "There's one more thing you need to know about,' Sinclair said. 'Jehovah is two entities.' What do you mean?"' There's a thing called the Shekinah. Some call it the glory or splendor of Jehovah, others say it is the divine manifestation of Jehovah in the material world, implying that the Lord does not fully enter into material existence. Some say it is the feminine side of Jehovah, or something like the Christian Holy Spirit. We say it is the mask Jehovah uses to hide his true, disgusting nature. When he appeared in ancient times to Moses and the High Priests of the Temple, he used the Shekinah to speak on their behalf. "But even the best mask slips. The Shekinah will disappear and the Lord will appear in his true form. Lucifer said this is the time when you must strike. Sinclair pointed to the Hallows Grail. "The hour of destiny is here. Pick up the Spear of Destiny, Lucy Galahan.Lucy went forward and picked up the spear. When she stood up, she realized something wasn't right. She didn't get the same electrifying feeling she had experienced back at Cadbury Castle, however, the spearhead was glowing, looking every bit a weapon of the supernatural. "The whole spear must be glowing, not just the spearhead. ", Sinclair shouted in sudden panic. "It will not work."

He turned to the others and they were all equally shocked. 'This is the pitch Hitler wielded. It must be genuine. "Lucy stood there, dumbfounded. How could anything go wrong at this stage? "Do something, Lucy," Sinclair shouted. "You are the Chosen One." Lucy closed her eyes and visualized the spear, trying to absorb its aura, trying to understand what it was off track. "Bring me the other spear," she said, "the one I found in the chapel at Cadbury. The Antioch Spear." "The tip of the Hitler spear is genuine," she said, "and so it is the shaft of Launch Antioch. All together, both spears were authentic, at least in

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part.Sinclair orders outside barked. Soon, Hitler's spear shaft was replaced with that from the Antioch Spear. Instantly, the Spear glowed, all of it, the shaft and tip. "It's time." Sinclair raised his hands, his relief all too evident. 'Everything is ...
"He stopped mid-sentence, looking straight at Lucy. 'What is this?"' She felt like she had grown a new head. Sinclair made the reverse sign of the cross with his left hand. 'What is that? "Your forehead," Sinclair said, "You have the Mark of Cain." metal, the reflection bearing two serpents side by side on her forehead. Then, it was all true: she was a direct descendant of Cain. For a second, the two serpents seemed to glow and glide, as if they were alive. Opposite her, the Stone Lucifer glowed, a vivid, sparkling green. "What's behind the golden curtain? ' Lucy asked, but it was a redundant question.

She had known it from the moment she set foot inside. Every part of her had felt the strange presence. It was the same feeling she had experienced several times before, but this time it was much stronger. "You know," Sinclair replied. "I want to see him. "This isn't your world. You'd see something grotesque. 'He's doing something, isn't he? With his mind.' . The Ark of the Covenant is right in front of us and within it is Jehovah himself, the Creator of this world. The Spear of Destiny is, here too, your special weapon. On top of all this, you are here, a descendant of last High Priest. Do you know what that means?' Lucy had a cunning idea, but she didn't want to say. 'This is Jehovah's last chance to save himself. All their energy is directed against you, trying to bend you to their will. If he can make him wield the Spear of Destiny in his name, he will destroy the rest of us. “And Lucifer is behind that curtain trying to stop the Lord from getting into my head, isn't he?"' That's exactly it. He is using all of his psychic energy to protect you. But he is in your enemy's world so he is having to expend great energy to withstand the power of Jehovah and put a shield around you. It is having a devastating effect on him.

""What do I need to do?" Lucy took a step forward. "How are we going to make Jehovah come to us? When he appeared to Moses and the High Priests, everything was on his terms. He called them, not the other way around. "'Jehovah thinks of himself as God, but he is just a demon - the most powerful demon of them all, but a demon all the same. The same rules apply to him as to any demon. He must come, if you call him by his real name. Sinclair gave Lucy a piece of plain white chalk. "Write your name on the inside of the pentagram," he said. "Your real name?
have no idea what it is. "" You do. Everyone does. It's But I Tetragrammaton.'Of course'. Tetragrammatos was a Greek word meaning four letters. The Tetragrammaton was the Hebrew name of God, made up of four consonants YHW H. This is where the name Yahweh came from, and Jehovah as its anglicized version. But there was another factor, which she had never understood, something about ancient Hebrew not having any written vowels and consequently not being certain how to pronounce YHWH. Doesn't it matter the language? Lucy asked. "I mean, don't I have to write this in ancient letters instead of Hebrew Latin letters?" The demons know your name in every language. As long as you get the right name in your chosen language, the demon must respond. inside the pentagram and wrote the letters YHWH, then quickly stood up and stepped back. Nothing happened. It's not a thing. Lucy looked at Sinclair. "This can't be," said Sinclair. 'The Devil must come for us. .' 'He's not the devil,' Gresnick bellowed. "He is God, and he will never do your bidding. Sinclair was

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pale, her hands start to shake. Lucy noticed her father's old ring shining on her finger. When she was a child, her father told her the ring had special powers that made him as wise as Solomon, giving him dominion over God himself. "I know what to do," she told Sinclair. "Give me your ring. Sinclair removed it and pushed it toward her. She held it to the light of the Lucifer Stone and carefully examined it. 'Don't help them, Lucy,' Gresnick shouted. "You can stop this madness now." "Clear the letters away," Lucy said Sinclair. Immediately, the Grand Master got to his knees and, with the corner of his robe, wiped the letters 'YHWH' away. hard. She felt the presence of her soul-line, all the previous lives she led in her endless cycles of reincarnation. She felt much of the ancient lineage on her mother's side, leading her back to the last high priest who was in the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple before its final destruction. And she felt so much her father's blood coursing through her, the blood of countless generations going back to Cain himself. But there was a stage, besides, wasn't it there? Cain's mother was Eve, and his father was an Angel of Light. Lucy: Lucifer's offspring. Her final ancestor stood behind the curtain a few feet from her, the chief of the seraphim, the greatest of the nine choirs of angels of the angelic hosts. 'Seraph' came from Sarafe, an ancient word for serpent. The seraphim were the serpent angels, hence the marks of the serpents until now on their foreheads. He knelt once more with the chalk. Now, she carefully began to write a new set of letters - the ones inscribed on her father's ring. They formed the words Shem ha-Mephorash. They were the magic words, his father had told him, that gave Solomon command over demons and spirits, that allowed him to call demon Asmodeus Bow to help him build the Temple, and that allowed golems - false men without souls - to be created . They were the same words that Moses spoke at the Red Sea. By invoking the words of power, the ring bearer can also glimpse the future. Lucy's father made a point of telling her another fact about Solomon, which now seemed surprising: Solomon had turned his back on the Lord and become an apostate. . How can it be? The very man responsible for the great Temple ended up denying the Lord and died in disbelief, full of hatred for the Lord. The Temple itself was given over to the worship of the Lord of the enemies. However, everyone knew that Solomon was the wisest of men. Will this wisdom finally lead him to Gnosticism? Lucy was in the middle of writing the lyrics when Sinclair told her to stop. "No," he replied, "that can't be right. Shem ha-Mephorash means "the explicit name." It's an epithet for Satan's true name, but it's not the name itself. Lucy shook her head. "You are. wrong. This is the name that was written on the underside of the stone. 'Sinclair looked at her, momentarily horrified, but then he began to smile. 'Yes, but what more disappointment do you expect from the Prime Deceiver?'

What better way for him to hide his true name than under the guise of an epithet? Who could guess the epithet was the real name? It's a genius. "Lucy began to write again, but tears clouded her eyes as startlingly vivid memories of her childhood and her father overwhelmed her. Lifting up her sleeve, she tried to wipe them away. Noises exploded behind her. Shouts, a fight. She heard the voice of Gresnick."Don't do that, Lucy. You can't let it end like this. You should not. "She twisted around to see what was happening. Gresnick grabbed a sword from one of the knights and ran towards Sinclair, holding the two-handed sword. Morson grabbed his pistol and fired at Gresnick. Two bullets hit Gresnick's legs and he lying forward, with his hands dangling in front of him, with his sword clanging against the ground. "Should I kill him?" Morson raised the pistol and took aim again. 'No, I want him to see this,' said Sinclair. ,

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as he bleeds to death. "Lucy saw Gresnick's blood spreading across the floor.
When it reached her hands, she held them up, looking at the blood. 'I can't bear this,' she said. 'Don't destroy us, Lucy. Gresnick's voice was already getting weaker. “We bleed, we suffer, but we love dearly. I beg you, don't kill love.” Lucy hated those words. I had spent a lot of time in the last few months trying to avoid feeling anything.
Now feelings were swarming her from all directions, driving her crazy.
Lost love, sadness, abandonment, loneliness... everything she feared. She thought about her father. Sinclair said he had committed the greatest of crimes - being in love. Not with the true God, but with the things of this earth. He tasted his soul was still seduced by the beauty of the world. He wasn't ready for heaven, his name wasn't written on Lucifer's stone. She had seen her own name there, but does she want it to be? Wasn't she the same as her father? Life had disgusted us quite often, but it could still offer breathtaking moments. Every now and then, something that transcended misery, like the lone red rose in the cemetery at the ruined abbey. Its smell, its texture.

So infinitely beautiful. Was it really one of the devil's traps, one of his tricks to keep souls trapped in this world? James, as he died, spoke of beauty. He would have given anything for just one more second to appreciate beauty, wouldn't he? Can a moment of ecstasy rescue a life of despair? Maybe only an artist could live that kind of life. Can beauty exist in heaven, where nothing changes, where nothing dies or grows old, where there is no cycle of death and rebirth, there are seasons of growth and decay? How can there be beauty when everything is beautiful? Perhaps beauty, true beauty, only exists when it is perishable, since it contains the seeds of ugliness. "I've changed my mind," she murmured. "I can't do this, I can't." "You can't stop now," Sinclair shouted at her. 'I'm not going to kill the human race,' she blurted out.

"No one can take this responsibility. '"Don't you understand anything? You will be saving us, freeing billions of imprisoned souls. If you don't do this, you will be the worst traitor of all. Do you want to be the person who condemned humanity to hell for all eternity? "The temple began to shake. The huge golden cherubs shook, long cracks appearing on their legs and wings. Lucy looked up. She couldn't get any power in her legs to get up and get out of the way. The vibrations increased, the cherubs shaking. more violently."Get out of here, Lucy,"

Gresnick grumbled. "The whole place is falling down." Lucy remained motionless on her knees, her energy gone. She stared numbly at the Ark, vibrating at its altar. Fragments of the cherubim's wings were falling around her. Finally she managed to transport herself to her feet. Gresnick was somehow getting up too, despite blood oozing from wounds on his legs. Yelling, he took a step and pushed her out of the way. Both cherubs fell. One's head snapped off and hit Gresnick, his body falling right where Lucy had ended up. Lucy crouched over Gresnick. He didn't appear to be breathing. His body felt as if every cell was on fire. The pain was unbearable. Leaning closer, she kissed him on the forehead, just as she had once kissed her father in his coffin. "Thank you," she whispered. Sinclair and the others surrounded her. "The pain will never end, Lucy," Sinclair said. "Can't you see this? Everyone you loved and loved is dead. This is a valley of tears. You can end this horror. You can end it now. You have the power. I beg you, set it free." us of this prison, this eternal penal colony. With one blow, you can make hell disappear.

You can stop the suffering of all time. There is no more tragedy, no more pain.
'He took her hand and lifted her to her feet. 'Get it over with,' he insisted.'The End

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hell.'Lucy looked at the Ark, feeling sick. 'You know it's in there, Lucy,' said Sinclair. 'Jehovah is coming, manipulating your mind. You must resist. Lucy nodded slowly. It always had to end like this, didn't it? Sinclair was right. There was just a lot of pain. It wasn't a moment of beauty that rescued his life, it was a moment of suffering that condemned him. For anyone anywhere to be in torment meant the world wasn't worth it. She returned to the pentagram, crouched again, and completed Solomon's magic word, the word to call upon the Lord. The entire temple was shaking now: the floor, the ceiling, the walls. The structure could collapse at any moment. 'Look!' Sinclair shouted. "It's happening. Lucy looked at the space directly above the miniature golden-winged cherubs on the lid of the Ark - the so-called mercy seat where the Shekinah was said to appear. A strange orange glow had appeared, just an intense point of light initially, but rapidly expanding to the size of a tennis ball, then a football, getting bigger all the time, starting to elongate, with new shades of orange swirling into the original color. Sinclair's eyes were fixed on the light glowing, her face a strange mix of hatred and curiosity. Lucy felt like she should say something, but words seem futile now. She stood there, rooted, with the Spear of Destiny in her right hand, its blue glow becoming increasingly brighter. Lucifer's Stone was equally bright, shining like an emerald sun. Was it really happening? If she had actually summoned God? The gold leaf curtain behind the Ark whispered something and it staggered out from behind it. As the glow over the mercy seat became more intense, Lucy looked at the thing that appeared - a huge, shapeless, infinitely black figure, with twelve wings, twice the number of an ordinary seraph. Darkness seemed to be coming from her. It was a grotesque parody of a literally decomposing angel as it moved, its flesh bubbling and dripping onto the golden floor, feathers from its many wings fluttering around it. Lucy had never seen anything so repulsive, and her ugliness grew in proportion to the intensity of the orange light above the Ark Sinclair caught Lucy. "Don't be fooled. In the realm of the true God, he is the most beautiful angel of all." She shrugged him off and held the spear above her head, pointing at the heart of the orange glow. The spear now radiated with the same luminous light as the figure taking shape above the Ark. The Lucifer Stone had changed its color to orange as well. Everything in the room was bathed in the same glow. It was as if the ethereal light above the mercy seat was absorbing everything, transforming the entire world around it. "Wait until the Shekinah has been fully realized." Sinclair's voice was calm and cold now. 'Striking when he is starting to be replaced by the abomination that lurks behind him.

You must not let the monster come to fruition or it will destroy you. He is only vulnerable at the moment of transition, as he first shines into his earthly body. You only have one chance. Go straight to the heart. That's what Lucifer instructed. Lucy looked at the wondrous figure flickering into existence in front of her eyes. They had said that the Shekinah was the beautiful earthly presence of the Creator, but that did not do it justice. It was majestic beyond words. An impossible dream, a shining, shining beacon of infinite hope, beauty in every form. And suddenly there he was, totally in this world. The Shekinah was not so much feminine as androgynous, but spectacularly, unfeasibly beautiful.

The orange light became a bright, dazzling white. The glowing figure opened its eyes and they were blue like a sky in a perfect world. If God never existed, this was God. Then two extraordinary things happened at the same time. The Shekinah began to dissolve, replaced by a new light, beyond anything indescribable

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Lucy had seen in her life. And a Papo bird flew into the Holy of Holies, landing on the lid of the Ark, just under the mercy seat. He began tweeting, oblivious to everything around him. "Do it now," shouted Sinclair. 'Strike. Straight to the heart. "Lucy raised the spear, but now it felt heavy, incredibly heavy, so heavy that she thought she must surely let go. Everything seemed to be pressing down on her, like the sky on Atlas's shoulders. She looked at her father's medallion. Around her neck, on her shining ring she placed it on her finger. The birdsong came into her mind. Let the birds sing. She could hear James' dying voice. Let them sing how much I loved you. The RobinRedbreast it took off again and flew in a circle around the head. 'Now!' Sinclair shouted. "There's no time left." Lucy knew exactly what her father would do, what James would do, the love, the life demanded. Suddenly, the spear felt heavy. He knew exactly what was on his mind , where she wanted to throw the spear. Throwing it with all her strength, he flew forward at a fantastic speed and immediately hit his target straight in the heart. 'No!' Sinclair shouted. He staggered forward, staring in disbelief at the spear embedded in the chest of the black figure towering behind the Ark. Lucifer staggered back, his enormous wings collapsing.

He dropped the golden curtain as he fell to the ground, letting out a horrible gasp. Lucy went back to the Ark and saw Lucifer crawling forward, making a pitiful squeaking sound. He managed to get as far as the altar that carried the ark, and arrive towards the Lucifer Stone sitting on top of the Stone of Destiny. He rolled onto his back and looked up, holding Lucifer's stone to his chest. For a second, his body glowed. The darkness was replaced by a light so bright that it was as if the entire world, the entire universe, had lit up. The dying figure was transformed into a supernaturally radiant angel with glowing golden eyes, so beautiful that it made Lucy feel breathless, dizzy, sick. He was made of a shimmering ethereal substance, with twelve perfect wings shining with living gold. Then he was gone, taking the Lucifer Stone with him, leaving nothing but a pile of ash and a cloud of black dust behind the Ark. A gust of cold wind disperses the ash. 'What did you do?' Sinclair shouted. "Lucifer, Son of the Morning, the Shining One, the Bright One, Helel Bel Shaar, Angel of the Morning, Son of the Dawn. You have already destroyed." figure taking shape above the Ark, but the sword went right through him. The figure, quickly becoming less hazy, its features growing more defined with each passing second, sent out filaments of multicolored light that comprised the Spear of Destiny, where it He lay down on the ground and stood up. Grasping the spear in his left hand, he pointed it at Sinclair with his good, then, palm-up, slowly raised his translucent hand. Screaming, Sinclair was lifted off the ground by an invisible force. He was suspended in the air, cursing wildly.

The figure clenched its fist, then released it. Sinclair was thrown backwards through the air and crashed into the opposite wall. The impact was so violent, his head was broken. Blood, brain, and skull fragments slid down the wall. Lucy looked away, horrified. He knelt down, closing his eyes. It was very painful to look at. Placing her hands over her ears, she tried to block out the sounds, but it was impossible to block out the screams of others. It seemed to me that, one by one, the figure was transforming into each of Caine's priesthood, destroying them with beams of fire from his eyes and the tip of the Spear of Destiny. She heard Morson shouting and firing his pistol, each shot growing like a cannon. Then came a grotesque scream. The Temple shook more violently than ever. Lucy tried to block out the thoughts running through her head. She kept

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eyes closed. I'm going to pass out. She wanted to be oblivious to everything around her. Even through her closed eyelids, she could see the bright lights. The golden curtain caught fire.
The smell of smoke was unbearable. In his mind, Rafael's mural flashed up. He was burning. Everything was burning. Your heart, your soul. The whole world was on fire. Burn it, burn it all. Incinerate all of Creation. His eyes opened again. The figure above the Ark had fully materialized and was looking directly at it. Falling forward, she vomited, then slid into her own vomit. The figure was laughing, the sound growing louder and louder until the Holy of Holies shook from the noise. There was only one thought in Lucy's mind. God of Mercy - What Have I Done? behind the ambulance. He had only been allowed one hour for his visit. The doctor said he should not leave the hospital at all, but Gresnick felt he must come here to find out what finally happened. They handed him his cane, and he struggled to the convent's entrance doors. It gave him such a strange feeling to be back at Glastonbury. In hospital in Bristol, he thought of nothing more than that night on Glastonbury Tor. He was told that he was knocked out by one of the falling statues. Blood loss caused by injuries to his left leg brought him close to death.Another hour and it would have been all over, said a doctor.It seemed that the nuns at the convent that fateful night saw the entire Glastonbury Tor light a cigarette from within and thought they they were witnessing the Second Coming.

As soon as dawn came, on the most beautiful day they had ever seen, the nuns went to the Tor. What they discovered was Lucy, wearing beautiful robes and standing in the center of a circle of cherry blossom trees. The trees had shed all their beautiful pink blossom, but instead of falling to the ground, it was swirling all around Lucy, forming strange patterns, almost like large fingers caressing her. One nun said it was as if the hand of God was holding her. Thousands of robins were in the trees, singing to her. White butterflies fluttered around his head like a halo of life. A rainbow of the most vibrant colors curved over the woods. However, the nuns said Lucy was in the worst state of shock she had ever seen. She looked, they said, as if she had just come out of hell. Over and over, she repeated one thing: Forgive me. The nuns soon discovered the entrance to the hidden temple. They entered and were met with a nightmarish scene. Everyone was dead besides Gresnick, and he only had the weakest of wrists. They took him out and Lucy and took him to a military hospital in Bristol. Lucy was quickly discharged back into his care when it was confirmed that she had no physical injuries. Gresnick shook his head. There are no physical injuries. Lucy was injured worse than anyone else. Mental wounds went much deeper. Limping badly, he tried to negotiate his way through the convent's front doors. Two nuns came out to help him: Sisters Maria and Bernadette, the ones who had carried him out of the temple.

She felt grateful and yet somehow embarrassed to see them. He showered his graces once again, but was anxious to leave. Commander Harrington, Gary Caldwell and Dr. Wells of MI5 had agreed to meet him here. They have been in the Glastonbury area for the past week, trying to piece together what happened, to prepare a detailed report for the Director-General and the PM, and to respond to questions raised by religious leaders. Gresnick was eager to find out if the commander had managed to make any sense of those last few hours in the early morning of April 30. The nuns escorted him to the small chapel where Harrington and his team set up his office. "Good to see you." Harrington reached out and gave Gresnick a firm handshake. "I hear your injuries are healing satisfactorily. That was a

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way to put it. Very slowly for Gresnick. Harrington had visited the hospital twice, but he couldn't remember a single thing they discussed. He suspected he had been incoherent, what with the pain and the drugs.
Caldwell had stopped too, but Gresnick recalled that the young agent didn't seem interested in getting his story out of him. Maybe it was understandable. After so many catastrophes, people were worried about getting their own lives back on track. "Sit down, Colonel," said Harrington. "I'll take you up to date with what's going on. I think there's a lot you want to know. Here, let's go for a coffee first. Strong and black, right?" Caldwell was dispatched to get the coffees and soon returned with a espresso tray. They sat facing the altar as they sipped their drinks. Gresnick asked if Lucy had once sat, also here, transfixed by the golden crucifix in the center of the altar. "You know,' Harrington said,' Scientists are claiming the Earth is now more stable than at any time in history. Catastrophic Realignment Theory - that's what they're calling it. Apparently the world reaches a point of massive instability where everything starts happening at once - moving faults, earthquakes, erupting volcanoes, tsunamis, hurricanes, magnetic storms, you name it. It's as if someone has become a valve to release an enormous pressure that has been building for millions of years. Now the pressure is gone and they are saying, we can look forward to a thousand years of unprecedented benign weather all over the world. The earth shines now, as if it has been cleaned and polished. They're not expecting any more natural disasters for a long, long time. We will be able to rebuild in peace. "Despite the optimistic things he was saying, he seemed tired. "They think four billion died, two-thirds of the world's population, but it must be a golden age for the rest of us if we can successfully rebuild our old formed lives. . "Gresnick was confused. Already, the dead were being forgotten. Civilization in South America, Africa and Asia had virtually ceased to exist. Most of North America was in ruins as well. Boston, where his parents lived, was the only major American city to survive intact. Huge swathes of territory would be uninhabitable for centuries to come. Only Australia and continental Europe escaped the worst, but millions of people died in England when the asteroid exploded over the center of the country, and hundreds of thousands of others perished when the crisis was at its height. Even so, everything was returning to normal with surprising speed. The London Stock Exchange was up and running again and it was really looming ahead - a million new investment opportunities. Capitalism never could be defeated, it seemed.Harrington said that a new Pope had been elected - the first ever black Pope. He was being hailed as a wonderful sign from God, ushering in a new era of racial harmony and tolerance. Already, negotiations were underway between the Vatican, the Anglican Church and the Orthodox Church about bringing together the main strands of Christianity. Even many of the anti-Catholic Protestant leaders were beginning to make conciliatory noises. Some optimistic commentators were claiming that there was a unique opportunity to unite all the different religions and produce a single world faith.Dr. Wells entered the chapel, wearing a smart linen suit, and looking notably more comfortable than when Gresnick last saw him at ThamesHouse. Strangely, he was eating fish and chips wrapped in old newspaper. "Good to see you, Colonel," said Wells. “I was very pleased when I heard you were still alive. It's tragic James didn't make it. He was a good friend.” Gresnick said nothing.

He didn't want to think about Vernon. 'What the hell do you have there?' " Harrington asked,

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Pointing to Wells' lunch. "The fish and chip shop on the high street has reopened. You can't believe how much I was looking forward to it. They even had brown gravy."
He handed the bag to Harrington. "Want a chip? The fish is haddock. No cod. The first delivery of fish arrived this morning. A miracle, really, given the state of the oceans a few weeks ago. Harrington looked at the fish and shook his head. Colonel?
Wells turned to Gresnick. "You have to admit - the smell is incredible." It was true. The smell of vinegar from the food was almost unbearable. But Gresnick was focused on something else. "The newspaper," he said, pointing to the wrapper for the fish and chips. Wells looked at it, then shrugged sheepishly. "I'm sorry, I didn't know." "Let me look at it." Wells reluctantly handed over the old sheet of newspaper.
“This was printed at the height of the crisis,” he explained. "No one understood what was happening at that time. Scientists had not yet formulated Catastrophic Realignment Theory." Gresnick looked, horrified, at the color photograph in the newspaper. single word - Messiah. 'God Almighty,' Gresnick said. 'How did Lucy's picture end up in a newspaper?' 'I think everyone went a little crazy,' said Wells. "It was the Vatican that said that humanity must pray for Lucy, that she was the only thing standing between the human race and Armageddon. Everyone wanted to believe it was true. "'What are you talking about?' Gresnick continued to stare at the image in disbelief. The entire time he was with Lucy, she was disheveled, without a trace of makeup, but despite this, she had enormous natural beauty. Here, her black hair was neatly combed, her blue eyes sparkling, her face smothered in expensive cosmetics. Some kind of advertising shot. She looked simply stunning. "Psychologists concluded that mass hysteria arose during the week of disasters," Wells said. "The realization that the world really might be ending cracked everyone's minds. That's why most of us were ready to believe in a Messiah. We would have believed everything that allowed us to think that there was still a chance. But, I mean , how could a woman from an asylum possibly save the world? A psychiatrist said that the sanctification of a lunatic was symptomatic of the madness that enveloped everyone. End of story. "End of story? Gresnick could hardly believe what he was hearing. "Doctor, you swore one of our prisoners turned into an angel. Were you temporarily insane? I'm not proud of myself. I was not immune to hysteria. I admit it."

But

you weren't the only one to see the angel. Me too. Others as well, but they're all dead now. 'Was it really an angel you saw?' asked Harrington. 'Maybe it was just a collective hallucination, as the psychologists said.'The angel was there at the end, in the Temple. . He was no old angel. It was the Dark Lord himself. ""Listen to yourself, Colonel. I know I will never write a report saying there was a supernatural being in our interrogation cells at Thames House. I certainly won't be saying the devil pays us a visit. If you know what's good for you, you'll keep quiet too." But I was in the Temple. I saw what happened. Someone has to bear witness. "As far as we know, you were unconscious at the end," Wells said.

'You were seriously injured and losing a lot of blood. In moments like these, the mind plays all kinds of tricks. You may have dreamed it for all we know. The bottom line is that only two people survived what was going on in the Temple. One of them is a patient in this asylum, and the other was not in a position to clearly see what happened. Isn't it better to just leave it at that? What could be gleaned from probing further? "'The truth,' Gresnick snapped. 'Which is the

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true? "Asked Harrington."That's exactly what Pontius Pilate said. "Well, sometimes it's better to wash your own hands of the things you can't control. If you want to continue your career - maybe get a promotion - then you'd be well advised to do the same." "What about the Temple?" Structural had a look at it. They said it could collapse at any moment. After the bodies were removed, we concreted over the entrance. 'What?' "Two-thirds of the world's population is dead, Colonel. The planet faces the greatest reconstruction work in its history. We are satisfied now that all that has happened in the Temple had no bearing on world events. I mean, how could it? We have more important things to do than waste time on wild goose chases. The crime scene has been preserved, maybe in a few years we will be able to go back and do some final sense of what happened inside." "That's crazy." Gresnick was practically screaming. 'The Ark of the Covenant is there, and the Spear of Destiny. Jesus Christ... the Holy Grail." So you say, Colonel. We don't deny that there were several spectacular objects there, but we don't know if they're authentic, and, frankly, we're not very concerned right now. You claim you've found the supernatural, but In London, we faced good old-fashioned human panic. We saw nothing like what you saw. Like I said, now we have a world to rebuild. In this country alone, five million people died. Do you think survivors care about myths? and legends? They just want to get their old lives back." Gresnick shook his head. "I don't believe it. You're burying the truth. You're trying to airbrush Lucy out of history." "She's crazy, Colonel. Gresnick."God Almighty, she saved the world. I don't care what anyone says, she did it. We owe him everything. There should be a statue of her in every city. ""

Believe me, Colonel," Harrington stated, "Lucy Galahan will never be a feature in the history books. There is not a shred of proof that she accomplished anything. She became the focus of hysteria, a kind of last-day Joan of Arc. She's not the first and I'm sure she won't be the last. ""The truth lies within Glastonbury Tor, Commander. People need to know what happened, what Lucy did for us. ""As I said, the contents of the Temple are not a priority right now. I suspect it will be years before anyone turns to studying them. '"What about MORSON'S men?"The uniforms were found lying on the floor with some black powder inside them. Who knows what happened to them? All over the world, people died in horrible and bizarre ways.
We can't investigate every suspicious death. Gresnick was numb. Jesus, they were really going through with it. They were prepared to pretend that the most important event in human history never happened. God had already appeared on earth, and the Gnostic fanatics led by Sinclair and Morson tried to assassinate him, and only Lucy's heroic decision to cast the Spear of Destiny at Lucifer instead of God saved all of Creation from instantaneous annihilation. compare the religious fanaticism of Sinclair and others with the casual secularism of Harrington and Wells. If the two were to be believed, nothing supernatural happened: God and the Little Devil played no part in the events of April. 'I need some air before I see Lucy,' Gresnick said. 'Of course. There is a side door just down the hall. Do you want me to go with you? "'No, I'd like it to be for me.'" Gresnick limped out of the chapel and made his way along the corridor. He felt bad. Lucy deserved everything, but was getting nothing. She was an embarrassment to the authorities. The Vatican now claimed that it was the prayers of good Catholics everywhere that had saved the world. Lucy, he said, was a troubled young woman whose significance was mistakenly exaggerated. Incredibly, they

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They instead emphasized that Cardinal Sinclair died a hero, giving his own life to save Lucy from the hands of sinister anti-Catholic forces. They were talking about making him a saint. Gresnick had heard it all now. As he walked out into the parking lot, he looked up at the beautiful orange sun and the sky that had never looked so blue. Since April 30th, the weather has been perfect all over the world. All the dust and dirt particles that were released into the sky during the crisis, threatening to block out the sun and bring about a lethal permanent winter, have miraculously disappeared. Scientists happily said they had discovered self-regulating and self-cleaning mechanisms in nature, which, they claimed, quickly reversed the harmful effects of all disasters. What do they know? Just stupid hypothesizing. It was God who made everything right, who healed the wounds he had chosen to inflict on the world because of man's sin. Gresnick couldn't help but think about ROME LOVE. Everything was backwards in this new world. Already, he has been transferred to the worst possible start, founded on lies. No one seemed to understand that the reason the Earth was so stable now, the climate so benign and beautiful, was that God had done this to reward the human race for Lucy's refusal to go along with the Gnostics' insane plan. Lucy, Gresnick knew, could never have killed Deus since that was impossible by definition, but if she had thrown the Spear of Destiny at Deus, it would have been the final proof that humanity was irretrievably lost. In that same instant, God would have eliminated the human race once and for all. Only Lucy had stood between humanity and extermination. He wondered what would happen when the temple was finally reopened years from now. What would be done with the Ark and the GrailHallows? Should they be destroyed to make sure nothing like this happened again? He feared that they would be turned into a tourist attraction in due time and millions of people would flock to see them, and not understand a single thing of their true meaning. Not for a moment would they imagine that these ancient relics hid the deadliest secret of all. Gresnick noticed another old newspaper, blowing past him in the cool breeze. He stopped the paper with his cane. It is dated May 10th and once again showed Lucy's photo on the cover with the headline: Remember Her? - The False Messiah, and underneath, see page 5 for ten other false messiahs. Then, it hadn't taken the media time to get back up and running, and they reverted to their old bad habits without missing a beat. The world had learned nothing. The human race was as nasty as ever. Gresnick felt tears in his eyes. Of all the people in the world who didn't deserve this, Lucy was that person. She never asked for any of this. Not once did she make all the claims for herself. She was always humble and meek. He had never met someone so kind and loving, so concerned about others. However, the world wanted to mock her. If they could, they would sit her on the back of a donkey and parade her through the streets of every city in the country, so that people could throw rotten fruit at her. She became the world's scapegoat. She was the ideal person for the role - she couldn't defend herself. The truth was that everyone had been scared out of their minds for a week. Instead of facing this, the reality was much easier to say that Lucy was the only crazy person. Now that she was safely locked up, she had taken everyone else's madness with her. The world felt ashamed of how it behaved in that week of horror, how it was torn to pieces. He didn't like what he saw in the mirror.

Now people just want to forget. Lucy, unfortunately, reminded them of everything they wanted to do. Gresnick didn't like to admit it to himself, but he had fallen in love with Lucy. The reason he tried to avoid thinking about it was that he knew

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who was not worthy of her. There was nobody. If anyone truly was a Messiah, she was. She was too kind, too full of heart and kindness, too sensitive, to be a normal member of the human race. He lacked that wildness that everyone thrives on. He limped back inside. His insides were producing. There was no future for him in military service anymore. Not just because he wasn't fit for active service any longer. He simply didn't have the stomach for it right now. His grandfather's theories were right on practically every count. There was a ten thousand year old deadly plot to kill God, dating all the way back to Cain. The Gnostics, Cathars, the Knights Templar, the Alchemists, the Freemasons and the Nazis were all involved. It was more now, thanks to Lucy. Was the danger gone forever? That was another question. Out there, there would be new Gnostics, and they might rediscover the secrets of those who went before them. Maybe, one day, they'll try again, and maybe, then, there wouldn't be Lucy to stop them. When he returned to the convent, he found Dr. Wells finishing his fish and chips. Gary Caldwell was hunched over in front of a computer, while Harrington looked at the sunlight as it shone through the small stained glass walls, laying tiles of different colors on the chapel's cool stone floor. now," said Harrington. Gresnick sat down again. He looked at the figure of Christ on the golden cross on the altar. For a moment, he imagined Lucy there on that cross. The media had crucified her for no reason. 'O What do you think you're going to do now?' Harrington asked. Gresnick tilted his head. He had no idea what the future held for him. Maybe he would go back and stay with his parents for a while. "I wouldn't write his memoirs," Harrington said. "I don't think the DIA would appreciate it. Besides, no one would believe you. We certainly wouldn't corroborate some of your material. As far as we are concerned, the world has suffered a series of unpredictable natural disasters, that's it. There were no supernatural forces at play. As we assumed all along, the theft of religious artifacts had no connection to the catastrophes.

Nothing bizarre happened. No gods or demons came to Earth. "He smiled in a way that made Gresnick nauseous. "If you want to have a bright future, or even any kind of healthy future, Colonel, I seriously advise you to stick with that script." Gresnick turned and looked at the commander in the eye. "Forget the official script. What do you really believe? Harrington half-smiled. "I honestly don't know. If you're asking me if Lucy was some sort of Chosen One who saved the world, I totally deny it. Look at her now – demented. She's painting crazy portraits again. They're even more deranged than before." ." "I was there, Commander.
You were not. ""We've been through this before. You were probably unconscious. Maybe you hit your head. Maybe you were hallucinating. What did you actually see? When I first spoke to you at the hospital, you were incoherent.
At one point, you said that God materialized above the Ark of the Covenant. I mean, how can anyone take it seriously?" I know what happened, I know. Lucy saved us all, and this is how we reimburse her, get her back here in the asylum. There must be something we can do . She needs help from someone who understands what she's been through." "From you? You love her, don't you?" "I..." Gresnick's voice tailed off. He turned away in shame. "I'm afraid. "We have to mention some of the strange things that have been happening to her lately," said Harrington. wrists corresponding to where Christ was nailed to the cross,

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as well as a wound in his side, right where the Spear of Destiny pierced Jesus.
She is bandaged because her blood won't clot. The wounds stay fresh, but they don't get infected and her blood seems to replenish itself so she doesn't need a transfusion.
Her blood gives off a strange fragrant odor. She is in extreme pain all the time. '"My God, I had no idea."' crown of thorns from his head. Fortunately, these marks disappeared within twenty-four hours, leaving only the stigmata. The media said that his injuries were self-inflicted. Doctors say that his disturbed mind is producing these strange effects." the nuns? What do they say?'Oh, they're sure it's all real. They think Lucy is a saint. They started calling her things like Saint Lucia and Blessed Lucy. They never throw away any of their old bandages. Everything is maintained. I think they're going to build a shrine to her. '"Jesus, this is kind of a nightmare." "Come on, there's no point in putting him out any longer. I'll take him with her." Afterwards, Gresnick couldn't remember anything about the short trip he He made his way along the main narrow corridors of the chapel to Lucy's small room. The closer he got to Lucy, the more his mind tormented him. He could not bear the thought of the suffering she was suffering. 'Here is Lucy's room,' Harrington he said when they arrived outside his tiny cell. His name was written on a small board on the door, with a silver crucifix underneath. "She's gone somewhere in her head," Harrington observed, "and I don't think she's ever coming back." "Let me see her." Harrington knocked on the door, and he barged it open. The nun looked outside. Colonel Gresnick is here to see Lucy," Harrington said and the nun nodded. The room behind her was dark, lit only by candles. Slowly, she opened the door and called Gresnick in. When he entered, Gresnick felt his stomach turning over. Every hair on his body stood on end. Lucy was standing in the corner in black pajamas with her back to him, mumbling to herself. 'Lucy,' he said in a low voice. She didn't move, but she stopped mumbling. The nun went up to her and placed her hand lightly on her shoulder. 'Lucy, a friend came to see him. An American soldier. You would like to see Colonel Gresnick, wouldn't you?' At first, Lucy didn't react, and then Then, painfully slowly, she began to turn around. More and more of her features appeared in the dim candlelight. When she turned completely away, Gresnick wished he had never come here. She looked ghastly, almost preternaturally pale, her hair disheveled horribly, his hands and feet tightly wrapped in white bandages, with blood running down them. His eyes briefly focused on him. Instantly, she burst into tears, grabbed the pillow from her bed and buried her face in hers. Gresnick twisted away in revulsion, but it wasn't Lucy's reaction that then made every part of him go cold.

He shoved his hand in his mouth, trying not to vomit. "No one told me," he shouted, pushing the nun out of the room. Harrington was standing outside, hands in his pockets. 'Perhaps you understand now, Colonel. That's why this one has to end here. Gresnick grabbed him by the collar. "You son of a bitch, you should have warned me." "You needed to see for yourself." Gresnick turned around, his heart pounding. This was not possible. It couldn't have happened that way. "My God," he said, "what have we done? The image in his mind would never be erased. As Lucy turned to pick up her pillow, he took his eyes off her for the first time and looked at the rest of the room. It was covered with dozens of paintings, each of them showing a single figure.

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against a blue background, just like those in Lucy's cell when this whole thing started. But now the picture has changed. Under each was written a message, Kafka's desperate words: infinite hope, but not for us. Gresnick started to walk away, practically stabbing his cane against the tiled floor to let him go faster. He longed to run, but his legs wouldn't let him. Excruciating pain shot through them. Looking down, he faltered when he saw fresh blood staining his pants. 'Gresnick?' Harrington shouted after him. “Where are you going?” Gresnick's legs were in agony, but it didn't match the pain in his head. Dear God. The figure in Lucy's paintings was no longer a woman with dark hair and a blank face.

Now it was a male figure, with a face as recognizable as any you could ever imagine. The figure had other characteristics, like those of no one on earth. The scaly skin, the tail. Above all, the two horns, familiar from a million terrible medieval representations. Now he knew that besides doubting what Lucy saw in Solomon's Temple. There was no doubt this was the figure he saw seen hovering over the Ark of the Covenant. As long as he lived, he would not be able to escape it. He would haunt his every step, torment him with every breath he took. The God Lucy saw was the one good person he wouldn't want to meet. A name resonated in Gresnick's head, an unavoidable name. He was marked with it as if it were the mark of Cain itself. She represented the destruction of all his hopes, the end of all his dreams. "I know what she saw, he screamed into the hallway, to himself, to Harrington, to anyone who could hear. He was hoping, praying that someone would grant him absolution. But there was no forgiveness for that. His words echoed in the hall, becoming horribly amplified, regaining all surface as if they were determined to haunt him, to haunt him, to taunt him, for the rest of his life, and for all eternity in the hell that would surely now awaited him. 'Not God, no God,' he cried. 'Satan.' 'Don't be alarmed, colonel.' . It's natural that she should paint these pictures. Gresnick stood there in shock, struggling to regain his composure, to convince himself that he hadn't gone crazy. "Doesn't she ever talk?" He fought to stop his voice shaking. More excruciating pain that were never shooting through her legs.'Not a word since she returned to her room. She is a channel for God now. All his communication is saved just for him. 'Gresnick tried desperately to find something he could hold on to, the tiniest bit of hope, a single particle of consolation, to keep him from going under like Lucy. There must be a chance for redemption. It couldn't end like this, it just couldn't.

Some kind of boa had to survive. Colonel, your legs... we're going to need to get you to our medical center. "No," he replied. "I am fine." He looked back to Lucy's room. "Can I be alone with her?" He shielded his face to hide the tears in his eyes. If nothing was salvageable, there was no point in going on. The nun looked at Harrington and he nodded. 'Well, just for a few minutes.' Gresnick struggled back to his feet. He crawled back to Lucy's cell, ignoring Harrington. He entered and closed the door behind him. Gently, he removed the pillow that Lucy was still pressing to her face. "It's not all," he said in a low voice. "We can fight for this, Lucy. There was no response. She didn't make a sound. Her eyes became glassy, refusing to focus. "I was too scared to say it," he whispered, straightening her stray hairs. far away that had fallen upon her eyes. 'I love you'. There was not a glimmer of Lucy. Lifeless eyes... her spirit,

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his energy all gone. Holding back tears, Gresnick turned to the paintings.
He hated it more than anything on earth. They had stolen Lucy from him. In a frenzy, he tore them apart, every last one, tearing them to pieces with all the strength he possessed. "I don't care what you saw, Lucy. I don't care about any of that. I just want us to be together." We need each other to get through this. We can help each other. I'll take care of you until you're better. You'll be okay again, I promise." He hugged her, but her body was limp. No reaction at all. She's gone, and never coming back.
He turned around, desolate, struggling to breathe. When he reached the door, he heard a sound. He froze. Lucy's voice? 'What?' He spun. She was looking straight at him, her eyes shining with tears. In an instant, he had crossed the space between them, throwing hugs around her and holding her for dear life, almost crushing her against his chest. "Tell me again, Lucy, I beg you." Then it happened. His voice was unable to rise above the slightest whisper, but he heard every word with perfect clarity. As he felt her hand squeezing his, he began to laugh and cry at the same time. 'That's right, Lucy, that's right,' he said, overcome with joy. 'There's infinite hope, infinite hope, all hope. of the world. Even for us.

'It is finished